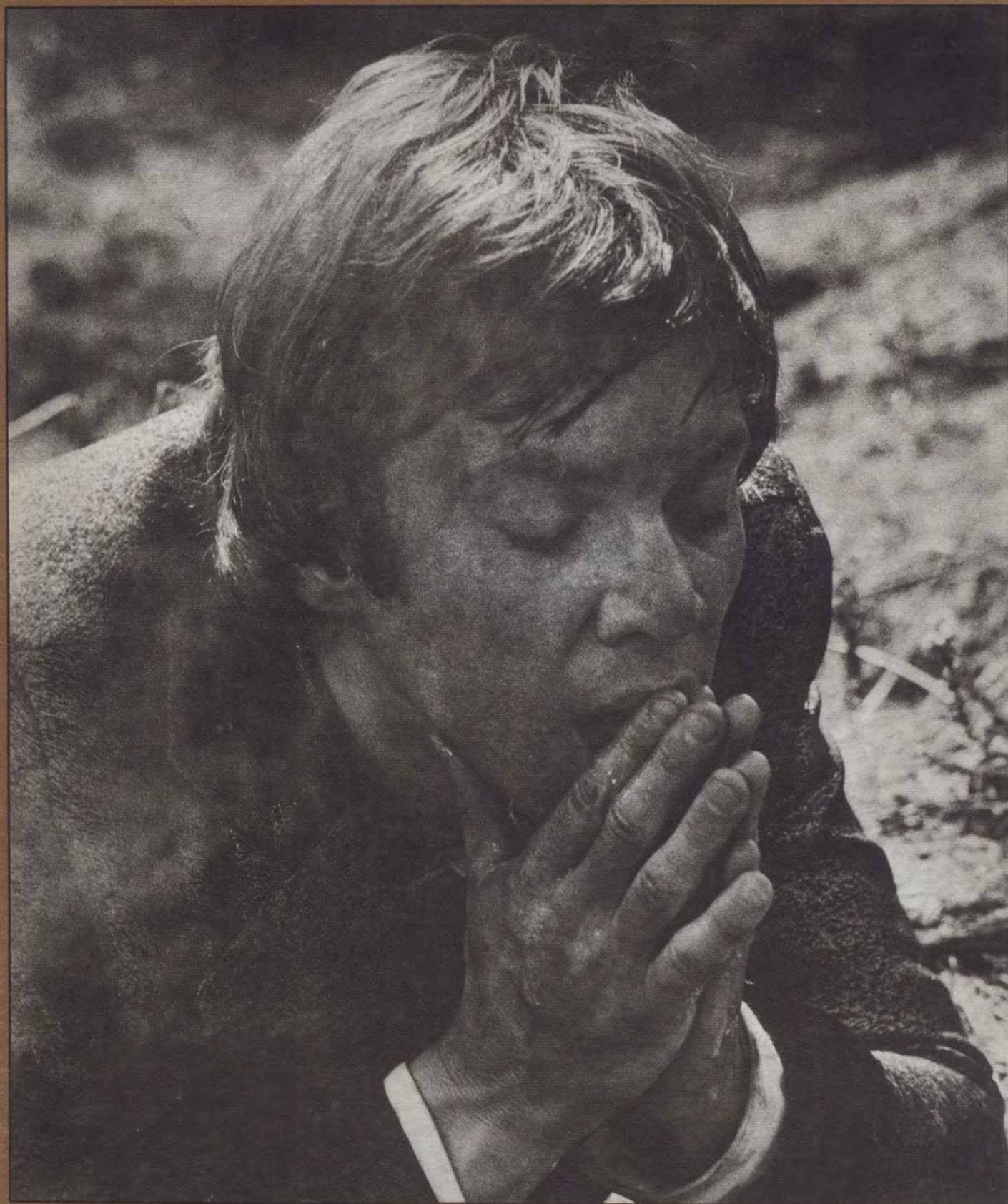


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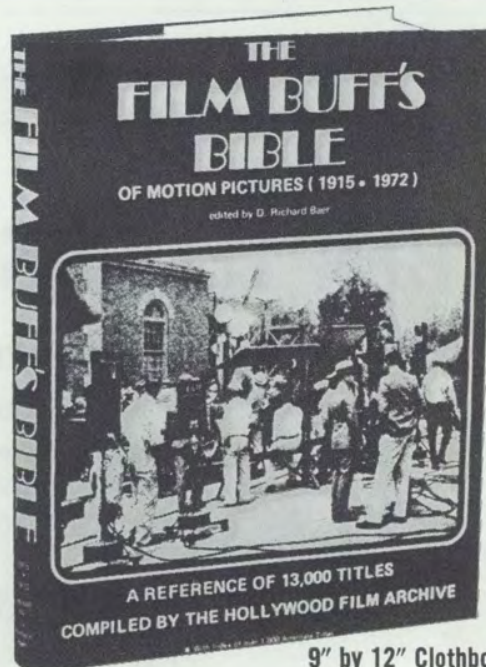
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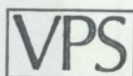
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On the cover: Malcolm McDowell in Lindsay Anderson's 'O Lucky Man'

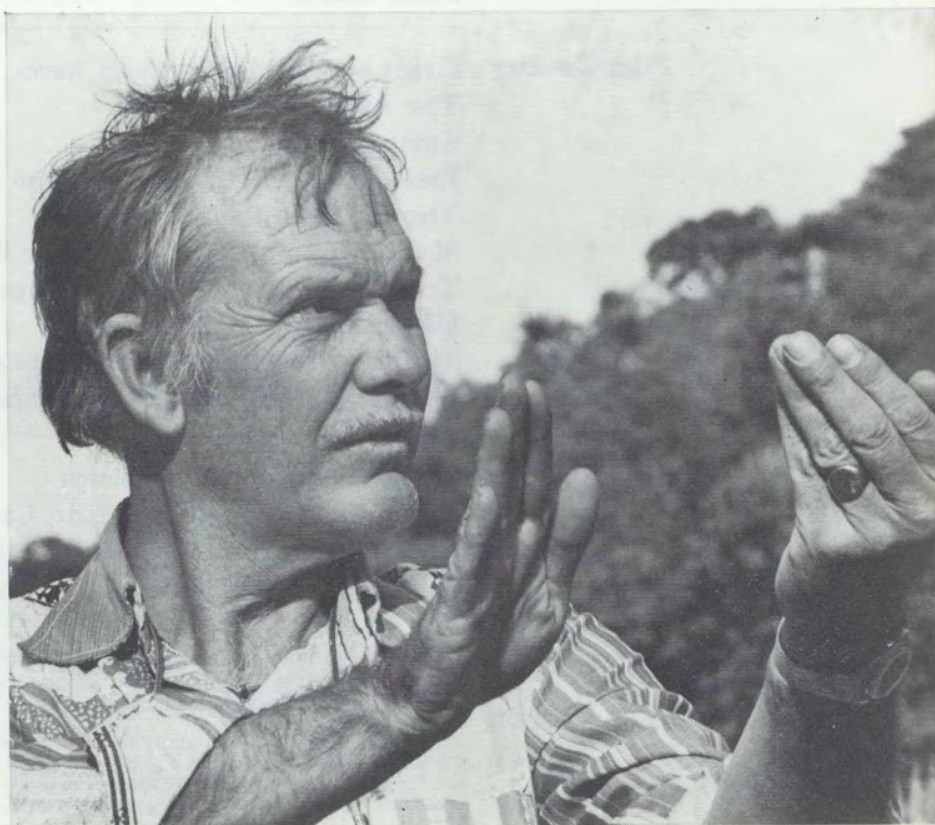
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PAT GARRETT AND BILLY THE KID

Jan Aghed



Sam Peckinpah was shooting *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, his ninth feature and sixth Western, on location around Durango in Mexico. Part of the film was shot in El Arenal, a poor little village half an hour's car ride from town, with a small river running close by and a barren plain between the village and the mountains in the distance. The sun was setting as Slim Pickens bit the dust.

Pickens plays Cullen Baker, an old sheriff asked by Pat Garrett (James Coburn) to help him against the badman Black Harris, to whom one of Peckinpah's creative stock heavies, L. Q. Jones, lends his moronic-looking appearance. Baker does not really want to go up against Black Harris. His heart isn't in it. The frontier is closing fast and there isn't much of the original spirit left in the oldtimers. Sheriff Baker would rather finish the small wooden boat that he is working on when Garrett shows up, trying to track down Billy the Kid; he would much rather go sailing on the Pecos River. Water in Peckinpah's films often has connotations of inner peace and harmony, even of purity and innocence recaptured. But finally Baker, persuaded by some gold coins, agrees to assist. And he dies.

But before he died, there was some horseplay and gunplay, caught by two cameras running simultaneously, and a nervous and comic interlude as Katy Jurado's shotgun (she plays Baker's wife) refused to fire. She was supposed to leap into Black Harris' dilapidated adobe emptying both barrels, but although the weapon operated smoothly every time one of the assistants showed her how to work it, the gun jammed as soon as she touched the trigger. Take after take had to be interrupted. The assistant demonstrated; the shotgun worked. Jurado leapt into the house and the gun jammed. After ten minutes of this, the assistant cursed her hysterically under his breath and made angry faces behind her back. But Peckinpah, who wore a gaudy bandanna around his head, seemed unperturbed, though his lips were more and more drawn back into a predatory grin as he regarded the fumbling prima donna from beneath half-closed eyelids.

When the scene was wrapped up at last, the director wanted some close-ups of Cullen Baker as he is hit and falls. It took quarter of an hour to arm Pickens with 'squids' (small 'blood'-containers joined to electrically manipulated charges); and when he fell again, with John Coquillon's camera running, his shirt was ripped open and red liquid came spurting out. And that's all from Cullen Baker—according to the script written by Rudolph Wurlitzer in collaboration with Peckinpah.

But at this moment it turned out that the director had a different notion in mind. As everyone knows, Peckinpah is preoccupied with death and the way his protagonists die. Steve Judd wanting to enter his house justified in *Ride the High Country*, Tyreen wildly charging the French lancers in *Major Dundee*, and of course the Wild Bunch: all challenge death and lose, but they only lose their bodies, as it were. In Peckinpah's world, death in dignity spells victory. To a remarkable extent his films deal with that terribly charged, breathless silence broken by Ernest Borgnine's giggle in *The Wild Bunch*; with that silence during which the heroes must make up their minds between a future as living anachronisms, therefore in self-degradation, and an immediate way to make good their claims to self-respect.

The latter alternative seems to be the reason why Baker finally agrees to help Garrett, despite a premonition of his own

death. In the script, as Garrett and Baker confront the gun appearing in the window of Harris' adobe, there is a 'moment of silence'. One is reminded of the similar moment in *The Wild Bunch* before Pike Bishop and his gang cut loose at Apache's army. And, after watching the filming of Baker's heroic last stand, one got the impression that Peckinpah suddenly wanted to pay a sentimental tribute to the gallantry of the old sheriff's existential choice. At any rate, the next take was a long departure from the script, an improvised additional scene in which the dying Baker, blood gushing from the holes in his body, slowly walked down to the river—which was, of course, where he had dreamed of going in the first place.

With Pickens moving heavily and yet gracefully away from the camera in long shot, suggestive of a dignified old elephant that insists on being left alone with his own death, and with the sunset and the mountains behind him, it looked like a magnificent scene. Even from the spectator's row at the shooting of a movie, even as one was surrounded by all sorts of technical equipment and a big crew and could see each phase in the manufacture of screen illusion, it was a strangely touching scene—a case where the huge alienation machinery didn't work at all. No silence had been ordered, but as the scene was being shot there was not even a whisper from the crew. Maybe the last act of Sheriff Baker's life will be as beautiful on the screen as Steve Judd dying.

As perhaps not everybody knows, William Bonney, alias Billy the Kid, was shot down and killed by his old friend, Sheriff Pat Garrett, in Fort Sumner, New Mexico, in 1881. Rightly or wrongly, possibly wrongly in most cases, Billy was credited with many indiscriminate killings. He was the first outlaw whom the dime novelists made into a myth in his own time. During the 1870s he was involved in a bloody range war, the so-called Lincoln County War, with powerful mercantile, banking and political interests figuring prominently in the background. A rather ugly stench of ruthless business ethics, exploitation, corruption, opportunistic law and order mentality and political wheeling and dealing rises from the historical page containing the drama of Billy the Kid; and most likely Billy, despite the eventual notches on his gun butt, was one of its least antipathetic figures. Billy's presence in New Mexico was finally deemed intolerable from the point of view of public relations, so Garrett was elected sheriff with

the objective of killing him.

'The inevitability of Billy and Garrett's final conflict fascinates me,' Peckinpah told me in El Arenal. 'Also the inevitability of Billy's death. Garrett finally made an effort to get him out of the county, which was huge at that time, and Billy of course wouldn't go—and was killed by him. History, as I understand it, is that Garrett's wife had a sister and, well, Billy had lots of girls, but that sister was the one he really loved. This is the irony of it. The other irony is the so called Santa Fe Ring, which was controlled by a group of people represented by Albert Fall and involved in a lot of land-grabbing and shady financial dealings, and Billy and the people around him resented that. Albert Fall later defended the murderers of Pat Garrett and got them off. You see, the same people who had hired Garrett to kill Billy years later had him assassinated, because as a police officer he was getting too close to their operation. They had already killed a judge and his son in New Mexico, and Garrett had indicted people for that murder; so he was assassinated. And it still happens today. Albert Fall later became United States Secretary for the Interior, which may be some comment on today's government.'

Respecting basic historical facts, but leaving out the socio-economic and political



Katy Jurado with the recalcitrant shotgun

factors and concentrating on the existential aspects of Billy's individual drama, the mythic qualities of the story and the implications of a father-son relationship between Garrett and the nine years younger Billy, the writer and critic Charles Neider wrote a very fine novel, *The Authentic Death of Hendry Jones*, published in 1956. From this book, Peckinpah wrote the first draft of what gradually became *One-Eyed Jacks* (1960), a picture which was begun by Stanley Kubrick only to be taken over by its star, Marlon Brando—who, according to Peckinpah, employed seven other writers on this costly vehicle for self-advertisement. The result being far from what he had in mind, Peckinpah took his name off the finished picture. Against this background, it is quite interesting to compare the script for *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* with Neider's

novel. Such a comparison suggests that Peckinpah still has a strong affection for the book—or his old draft.

One of many minor details: when Harvey French, a member of the Kid's gang, has been shot in Neider's book, he says, 'They've killed me.' The shot and dying Charlie Bowdre—Billy's companion—says the same thing in the script. In the novel, the narrator Doc Barker says about Harvey, 'He wasn't bad with a horse . . . but never very good with a gun.' This is echoed by what Billy says about Bowdre in the script: 'He wasn't too bad with a horse . . . but he couldn't hold a gun worth a damn.' The following conversations from the book and the script take place in jail, during a game of poker between the Kid/Billy, who is going to be hanged, Dad Longworth/Pat Garrett and Deputy Pablo Patron/Bell.

Book:

'What do you believe in, Pablo?' asked Dad. 'Me? I believe in God. The Church. That I'm only a little man.'
'You're not so little.'
'What do you believe in, Kid?'
'Nothing . . . About God. I hear He's fast but I'd like to see for myself,' said the Kid.
'You will.'

Script:

BILLY: I bet you pass the time with a stable full of beliefs, Bell.
BELL: The only belief I have is knowin' that I'm only a little man with a small job to do.
BILLY: Don't ever run down your size, Bell. That's the only thing that lowers a man.
BELL: You almost sound like you got some beliefs yourself, Kid. They've been known to help a man get close to his God.
BILLY: Well, I heard God's fast, but I'd have to go up against Him myself before I'd bet on it.
GARRETT: You will.

Deputy Sheriff Lon Dedrick, in Neider's novel and in the film *One-Eyed Jacks* (where he was played by Slim Pickens, by the way), bears a marked resemblance to Deputy Sheriff Bob Ollinger in the script. The Kid/Billy breaks out of jail, killing Pablo/Bell and Dedrick/Ollinger in the process. This is how Neider describes the latter killing:

[The Kid] saw Lon's face when he caught sight of Pablo, saw it twitch with fear and saw the gun hand leap up, as if to shoot at the dead man, heard him curse and saw him scan the adobe quickly, still running. Someone cried out, 'The Kid's killed Patron!' It was an old man's voice . . . But no one ventured out on to that plaza except Lon, whose job it was to come and get him . . . His eyes showed fear and his cleft chin looked as if he had spilled milk on it . . . 'Hi, Lon,' the kid said mildly through the broken pane.

Lon was just below him, holding the forty-five ready. He looked up, saw the Kid's face, saw the black muzzles facing him and cried, staggering back, 'He's killed me too!'

The kid pulled the trigger of one barrel.

Script:

The old man sitting in front of the Tunstall store gets up and . . . runs back to the protection of the store. Ollinger runs down the street, holding his six-gun. There is no sound on the street. Ollinger, feeling Billy's presence, stops, looks up at him. Billy is aiming the shotgun (through the barred window) at Ollinger's head. No one moves.

A voice calls out from the store.
BILLY: Hello, Bob—how does Jesus look to you now?
VOICE: Bonney's killed Bell.
OLLINGER (*his face stricken, staring up at the shotgun*): Yes, and he's killed me, too.

Another point I would like to bring up about Neider is his approach to death scenes. Like Peckinpah he is intensely preoccupied with death, and in describing how it comes to his protagonists he sometimes uses a literary method which has the effect of prolonging the very moment of death. Not of dying but of death, because they are dead as soon as the bullet or the buckshot hits them; but with poetic freedom the time dimension containing their death is extended, thereby granting them an opportunity to reflect upon the meaning of the loss of their lives, as in Lon Dedrick's case:

. . . And then, in a flash, he saw himself as if from a great distance, standing on the plaza on that hot bright morning, standing under the window, and saw himself get shot and the bitterness of it was that the Kid had outlived him, and he thought, I'm killed, the son of a bitch has killed me, they'll all be saying he killed me.

What would be the visual equivalent of this literary technique, if not slow motion? In contrast to all his bad imitators, Peckinpah has elevated what in lesser directors' hands is merely a superficial stylistic device to an apt and powerful poetic expression of agonising reflection on the finality of death; and I suspect that *The Authentic Death of Hendry Jones*, together with, say, Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*, may have been a source of inspiration.

Neider's novel is a superb study of the creation of Western myth. Peckinpah is concerned with the same subject. Neider observes the reality of the mythic figures, the end result of which is to present them in a totally unromantic light: ' . . . we were tired. The Kid looked so tired I was greatly surprised. The life of being always hunted was really changing him.' As Billy the Kid, watched by a big crowd, rides out of town after his successful jailbreak, one of Wurlitzer and Peckinpah's major concerns in the

James Coburn as Pat Garrett



film is indicated by this passage in the script: 'Billy is deeply aware that he inhabits a myth. He and the town people are suspended from mortal time, caught in a ritual larger than any man; each dependent on each other.' At the same time, the look of the West in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* will apparently be as little appealing mythically as the mining camp in *Ride the High Country*. The small towns and villages are dirty and decaying, the inhabitants are old, disillusioned, greedy, and their faces are hard and tired. Which brings us to the open land. A prominent structural theme in the script, as in all Peckinpah's films, and more prominent and more intensely brought forward in his films than in those of perhaps any other American director except Ford (with *The Searchers* as a prime example), is the terrible vastness of the country, the resulting loneliness of the times and the psychological consequences all this has for the people.

. . . You could not rightly understand those days unless you understood the effect of the land on a man. Out in the open country of New Mexico you could sit on your horse and ride and ride and camp alone when night came and ride again and sleep alone and ride again. So why should it surprise anybody that that kind of space, which rolls along like the ocean but which seems to have more secrets—down in the gulches and arroyos, in the hills, on the mesas and behind the buttes—could beat a man down until he was fighting mad, so that when he hit a little town he was so edgy it was best you let him be, asked him few questions if any and gave him plenty of room on the street, particularly if you had reason to believe that he liked his gunplay fast and sudden.

This is another excerpt from Neider's novel—as well as an excellent characterisation of an important creative aspect of Peckinpah's work.

Judd-Westrum in *Ride the High Country*, Dundee-Tyreen in *Major Dundee*, Thornton-Bishop in *The Wild Bunch*, and now Pat Garrett-Billy the Kid, indicate that Peckinpah is obsessed with polarised male relationships, where two former friends are driven into conflicting stands on each side of a thin line between social anarchy and a defence of stability and disciplined civilisation. Novelist and screenwriter Rudolph Wurlitzer told me, 'What the film really is about is the love story of two men'—which was denied by Peckinpah in one of our conversations. The reason for this denial might have something to do with what Wurlitzer said next, namely that the character of Billy was sexually very ambivalent in his original script version. 'I was very interested in the eroticism of a killer, the homosexuality even. But when Peckinpah came into the picture he felt uncomfortable with that. He doesn't want to deal with that sort of thing in his head, so Billy became a simpler character—more romantic, less ambivalent.'

'It's a kind of father-son film, with a close friendship and a type of fatalism about death that I think particularly appeals to Peckinpah,' Wurlitzer went on. 'Garrett is an ambivalent character, on the contrary, and Peckinpah got behind Garrett: he understands Garrett and he identifies with Garrett. He also identifies with Billy. I mean, those two things run right through Peckinpah. He considers himself the last of the outlaws, in a way. In many ways he is an outlaw, in fact. And he's a romantic, he's sentimental. Also he makes deals to survive,

which is what Garrett does. Garrett is essentially a man who to continue to survive had to become part of the system and make some kind of psychological deal with himself, trying to burn the outlaw out of him. Billy represents a vanishing point of view. Whereas Garrett represents the sort of compromise that you had to make when the West began to get settled and big money came in. That's a typical Peckinpah theme. And he has brought that to the script. It was there in the original also, but not as much as Peckinpah wanted. He really got behind that.

'The original script, which I wrote almost three years ago after a lot of research, was written for Monte Hellman. There was a point when I thought I was going to try to direct it, but then I decided against it—I wasn't ready to do it. Hellman wanted to do it, but there was a lot of bad feeling about *Two-Lane Blacktop*' (which Wurlitzer wrote and Hellman directed). 'That picture had a lot of publicity and everyone had tremendously high hopes for it and it didn't do particularly well. The studio didn't like it. So Hellman couldn't get *Pat Garrett* on. And then Peckinpah came into it, read it and liked it, so the studio went with him instead. And now I'm thrilled that he's doing it.

'When I wrote the original script I wanted to eliminate all the usual historical clichés. I started pretty much where most Billy the Kid films end—I've counted 26 of them. I started when Billy escapes from jail and Garrett hunts him for three months. No one knows what Billy did in those last three months of his life. That's why I felt free to explore the myth and to invent, while still trying to be historically accurate. Peckinpah, for his part, is really involved with the legend more than the historical accuracy. He's involved with the myth.

'Anyhow, you can say that Billy at some point made a fascinating existential choice. Everyone told him to leave New Mexico. The Governor of the territory, Governor Lew Wallace, said: 'Look, we're settling this territory and trying to attract money from the East. The country is changing and there just isn't room for outlaws any more, and it's gone past the point where you can disappear because you're too famous.' So he was given that choice. They said, 'Go to Mexico and we'll forget it. Or California or wherever. But just get out.' And what interested me was his decision not to get out. In other words, he chose to be Billy the Kid. If he had gone to Mexico he would have become just another gringo. But this choice made him become a hero. Because in choosing to be who he was, he also chose his death. He knew he was going to get killed. So there's that kind of fatalism, which really intrigued me. Garrett, on the other hand, made his own existential choice. He chose to survive. And he had to pay the price of that decision. Psychologically, when he shot Billy, he died too. The film is a kind of discussion of what the myth of the frontier means about freedom. Personal freedom as opposed to collective choices: that's another way of looking at the film. Garrett identified with the collective reality and Billy rejected it. So in a way Billy becomes anachronistic. And has to be got out of the way. And Peckinpah is completely obsessed with that theme, as you know. It gets into all his films.

'I wrote about three or four new scenes



Garrett (James Coburn) rides into Pecos on the trail of Billy the Kid.

when he came in and they were all action scenes. The script gradually changed as he became preoccupied with different themes. I wound up writing two or three scenes at the beginning of my original script, and now the film starts with a kind of flash-forward with Garrett as an old man seventeen years later getting killed by the very people that hired him to kill Billy. Peckinpah is really obsessed with power. And with the fatalism of a man getting his just rewards, the circle coming close. He is also very interested in the kind of political pressure that ultimately kills a man.

'So he imposed that flash-forward at the beginning. And then he started the film proper with a meeting between Garrett and Billy which was not in my script. I was very interested in not having them meet until the end; that seemed to be a more dangerous thing to do, more interesting, creating a subtler tension. But for Peckinpah to be intimate with a script it has to exist on a very explicit level, all the themes have to be out where he can be friendly with them. A major thing with Peckinpah is male friendship. It was very important to him to get that in at the beginning so that he could feel comfortable: he didn't want to have to think about it, he wanted to have it accepted, so that he could get on from there. So what we did was write this new scene where Garrett meets Billy and they're old friends. . .'

Billy the Kid will be played by the well-known country singer Kris Kristofferson, who acted in *Cisco Pike*, while another singer, of an altogether different magnitude, has been cast as one of Billy's friends: Bob Dylan, himself already a mythical figure. America's romantic past and the outlaw myth being far from unknown territory to Dylan, he has also written the theme song for the picture, but whereas his 'John Wesley Harding' five years ago chronicled the famous bandit's Robin Hood-like exploits,

the new song, which will be sung by the author on the film's soundtrack, is a sad, hauntingly beautiful ballad about the loneliness of a tragic hero:

They've gone to cross the river aimin'
at you,
The lawman on your trail he'd like to
catch you,
Bounty hunters too would like to get
you,
Billy, they don't like you to be so free.
There's eyes behind the mirrors in
empty places,
Bullet holes and stars between the spaces,
There's always one more notch and ten
more faces,
Billy, you're through walkin' all
alone . . .

Watching some subtle emotional scenes with Coburn, Pickens and Katy Jurado being filmed in and around Cullen Baker's house, my impression was that Peckinpah considers actors to have a good deal to contribute in the way of dialogue and that he reaches for their natural expressions, trying to change as little as possible as long as the contributions fit the character. Asked how he felt about working with him, Coburn, who also played the one-armed scout in *Major Dundee*, said: 'He has a strange sense of dynamics, I think. I like it because it's exciting to work that way. He prepares a scene much like any other director would, he'll prepare everything for you and you'll have a great set, meticulously flawed by the flawed genius Peckinpah, and then we will start the scene in an ordinary dynamic of leading up to the point. Only—the point is not what he is after. He's after the ambience more than the point of the scene, and he wants the audience to reach the point by causing them to work a little bit.

'He'll open up a scene and I'll be standing there and he'll come up and say something to me, nothing specific, like "less" or "It's a little bit too Western" or some kind

of crazy thing like that, and it somehow sends you off... "Too Western," what the hell does he mean, it must be my voice, "WHAT DOES HE MEAN?" But I've learned: you don't try to analyse, you just take the thing and go with it. "Too Western": you think about what you did last time and then you do the next one less of what you did or more of what you didn't do, and sometimes it comes out rather well. And sometimes it comes out—terrible! You think. And he loves it.

"So you find yourself in a strange place. He prepares everything for you and you're prepared and stand there and all of a sudden you're naked, you don't know where you're going or what's going to happen; you know the words, you know the other actors, you know your looks and all that, but you don't know what to play. And so you're just standing there like some sensitive reed in the wind. And it somehow works!

"It doesn't always work. I know a lot of scenes in Peckinpah's films where everything seems very wooden, because he has eliminated too much of the actor. Sometimes it looks rather stiff. I thought some of the scenes in *The Wild Bunch* could have been loosened up a lot—like that scene with the bottle and all the laughter: it seemed awfully forced and not like real hilarity. But maybe that's what he wanted. As Peckinpah himself says, he doesn't know what he wants until after he gets it. He's easy and he's difficult to work with. I have faith in him. And he's marvellous if you happen to come up with an idea, and often he immediately incorporates it and embellishes on it, which really is wonderful. Other times with Peckinpah you spend twenty minutes arguing about words that don't have any significance to the scene itself... He's not tied to anything, he's not rigid about anything. In fact, if anything the opposite is true: he's so loose that it sometimes scares a lot of people. But it puts you up to it."

"Peckinpah goes for the little bits in a scene," said L. Q. Jones, who accepted the small part as Black Harris out of affection for the director. "He has far-out ideas, but he makes an actor feel one can trust his instincts. When we made *Ride the High Country*—remember when those mad brothers came riding in to that marriage ceremony in the brothel? Peckinpah told me to sing during the ride. "You're crazy, man," I said. "I'm not going to sing—it doesn't seem right!" But he insisted. So finally we sang. And it was a fantastic scene on the screen. That's what I mean by trusting his instincts."

From all appearances the filming outside Durango was going smoothly, with the huge machinery beset by a minimum of friction and the big crew radiating harmony and dedication. An interesting characteristic of Peckinpah's films is the conspicuous presence of prostitutes. In his new picture, Garrett has a long, semi-sadistic session in a whore-house, slapping the obliging employees quite a bit before riding off to the shoot-out at Fort Sumner. The very large and seemingly happy family in El Arenal included two prostitutes, a black and a white girl. Apart, of course, from the basic reason for their being there at all, the two girls seemed to be treated without any condescension whatsoever but with friendliness and warmth; in fact, as equal members

of the family. But you didn't have to be around El Arenal and Durango very long to register some tensions beneath the surface.

People who are close to Peckinpah, or purporting to be close, said that he is deeply hurt by what he feels to be the industry's lack of recognition and respect. In addition to what happened several years ago to *Major Dundee* and in connection with *Cincinnati Kid* (Peckinpah marching off the picture after a controversy with the producer Martin Ransohoff), there was the cutting of half an hour from *The Wild Bunch* in its U.S. version and the Academy Awards that it didn't get, plus the indifferent promotion and distribution of *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* (which Peckinpah considers his best film) and of *Junior Bonner*. All this is said to have made him bitter. His resentment of—or rather hate for—the Hollywood business establishment is of the vitriolic kind; and, according to some, perhaps finds expression in what appears to be solidly justified paranoia. The latter term in Peckinpah's case is often used together with variations of 'creativity'. Thus Coburn talked with admiration and affection of the director's 'creative paranoia', adding that he sometimes has a feeling that Peckinpah is deliberately provoking tensions 'in order to cause everybody to have the same kind of experience to feed on when they're making the film.' At the same time, the actor exempted 'the present crisis' from this psychodrama-oriented behaviour pattern. Wurlitzer put it this way: 'Peckinpah needs the paranoia and the studio is all too willing to give it to him.' The studio is Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

'MGM are a perverse big machine,' said Wurlitzer. 'They've really done everything to impose the bureaucratic mentality on everybody. To begin with, the sexual innuendoes and a lot of the language have been cut out of the film, severed by the studio. The reason why they cut it out is television. They're going to make the cost of the film back on a TV sale, they hope. And the censorship is much heavier on TV, so you have to shoot a TV version. Ideally, from their point of view, you shoot a movie version and a TV version, but it's an impossible thing to ask a director to do. So it's a real problem...'

A young intellectual from the East Coast, wearing a huge moustache, a Stetson on his bald head, blue jeans and high-heeled cowboy boots, Wurlitzer looked as if he, perhaps inspired by the vicinity of Western myth, had cast himself as Billy the Kid in some secret private dream. Right now his face was deeply worried, as if he had seen one of Governor Wallace's posses appearing over the nearest hill just as he was running out of ammunition. 'They imposed a very strict shooting schedule,' he said. 'We've already (a week into the filming) had to drop certain key scenes, so the film going in is not as good as it could be. And I predict there'll be several other scenes dropped before the final result. We're likely to be over budget and several days behind. It will get heavier before this is over, I'm sure.'

MGM had given Peckinpah fifty days to shoot the film. 'It's definitely underscheduled,' said Peckinpah. 'It'll be almost impossible, particularly with the cast I have, considering that Bob Dylan has had no acting experience, and Kristofferson hasn't had much, and using so many local people

and so many locations and so much action. My estimate was 58 days. I spent three months trying to persuade the studio. It was hopeless. Altogether, there's more pressure than I expected. Do I anticipate any severe crisis with the company? Always there's a severe crisis with the company.'

On his desk as he said this was a letter from the producer and star of his latest film, Steve McQueen, expressing the hope that Peckinpah wasn't feeling too bad about the changes which McQueen had imposed on *The Getaway*. What changes?

'He made some cuts which were minor and almost inconsequential. He had one line added, a scene shortened by approximately three feet, and a series of dissolves set in. I thought very early on that this last idea was a good one and even suggested it to the cutter, so we were planning on doing something like that. He also got very involved in the dubbing, to get the sound of the cars right, which seems to be one of his main preoccupations. That's OK with me. But I do think his rescoring the picture, though perhaps it doesn't damage the film, was a costly mistake. I loved Jerry Fielding's music. It worked fine for me, with that balance which I like very much, and all in all I thought the picture played very well and so did everybody else. Except Steve. But this film was very important to him and Ali MacGraw and I can't really blame them for taking interest as long as his company is paying for it. It doesn't bother me too much.'

There were other things, though, bothering Peckinpah too much in Durango. He is probably the most hard-working major filmmaker in the business. The fact that *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* is his fourth feature in little more than two years, taken together with his long-standing difficult relationship with the industry, 'his fear of being laid off by the studios and not being able to do any more films' (Wurlitzer), 'the intensity he brings to the creation of a film and his urge to take all the responsibility himself' (Coburn), the harassment of his daily fight for creative independence—all this could have brought any director towards the brink of nervous exhaustion. Peckinpah, who behind a tough façade is a deeply sensitive, tender and vulnerable man, sometimes looked rather close to the brink. There was, for instance, an ugly episode one Saturday evening in his study, when two men became involved in a fight and the dark undercurrents of violence which Peckinpah lets loose on the screen and plays with in his private life, his largely Mexico-bred semi-cult of *machismo*, seemed to have sprung a trap on him.

Tired and visibly shaken, Peckinpah tried to calm the two antagonists, one of whom—a Mexican—was soon shouting into a telephone, ordering his secretary to dispatch, pronto, two gunmen to Durango to take care of the other man before any new attempt was made on his dear friend Señor Peckinpah's life. A while later, the Mexican told me that he had a small army at his disposal, that he now and then unfortunately had to kill someone, and that a couple of years ago he gave an order which led to the execution of 400 people. What was this: drunken fantasies or some crazy joke? Some of the other Mexicans around assured me in hushed voices that the boast should not

be taken lightly: the man had powerful extreme right-wing connections and, as a matter of fact, was a few years ago involved in bloody reprisals against demonstrators. Not such a wild fantasy after all, perhaps, or at least a fantasy rooted in actual conditions, if one considers the power structure of Mexican society, the massacre of what possibly amounted to several hundred students during the Olympic Games of 1968, the government-sponsored terror against the Left and the number of political dissenters in the prisons. Later the same evening, a new telephone call to Mexico City, this time on Peckinpah's patient insistence, cancelled the order for the gunmen; and the director sighed audibly with relief.

A few days later, MGM's production supervisor and executive producer Lewis Rachmil came down to Durango. He showed up in El Arenal wearing a cowboy hat and a smile for everybody. 'We're in a business today of pure economics,' he said. 'After a certain amount of money a picture won't pay off. Simple, isn't it? And that's of course why Peckinpah can't have more than 50 days. Actually, he could finish the shooting within 36 days, if he wanted. But we're generous enough to give old Sam some extra time.'

Rachmil then explained the meaning of the two preview cuts that Peckinpah is entitled to on *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*—the right of final cut being the studio's. 'At the first preview, the picture as the director sees it is presented to the studio executives. This is the time to argue the different points with the studio,' said Rachmil. 'At the second preview the print is seen with an audience and afterwards the audience fill in these cards, and someone writes, "Well, I liked this or that scene, but that thing puts me off." So then we just might have to tell the director, in this case Peckinpah, "Look, we've got three million dollars in this picture. You've got to make some changes."'

Peckinpah seemed unmoved by MGM's generosity the last time we talked. It was early in the morning and he was sitting up in bed reading a fat volume about Pancho Villa. On the bedside table was a huge sheath-knife. He talked about his deep disgust with present American civilisation in general and with living in California in particular. He would like to settle down in Mexico. 'I'm a cynic now. I don't think there's any more freedom left.' Then how does he define freedom? 'I'll define it on film, which I've tried to do several times. Each of the main characters in the pictures I've made had something to say about their purpose in life and what they felt about freedom,' he said a little cryptically.

Five years ago, when he was out of favour with the studios, he co-wrote a film about Villa. Now he is dreaming of directing one, a good picture about Villa for a change, a sympathetic vision of the great revolutionary leader, and he is toying with the idea of getting financial support from the Mexican government. That could mean a lot of compromises, couldn't it? 'Compromises?' He got out of bed and took the knife and threw it at the wall. 'I have to make compromises all the time.' The knife had sunk into the wood and sat there, handle quivering. He looked satisfied because of the skilful throw. 'Good for self-discipline,' said Peckinpah. ■



'Cable Hogue'

SAM PECKINPAH

the survivor and the individual

Nigel Andrews

The appearance of his latest film, *The Getaway*, strengthens the view that the central concern of Sam Peckinpah's work is with the conflict between survival and individualism: that his films embody in their stories and characters a tension between two ideals of fundamental value which remain perversely hard to reconcile. To begin with a definition of terms: the individual, for Peckinpah, is the man who is loyal to his own beliefs and values rather than to those of an external regime or creed, and who is also, in the stricter sense of the word 'individual', one who cannot be divided—that is, he will not willingly bend from his beliefs in order to survive, and will not diminish himself by sacrificing, even temporarily, his own values. In their various ways, Steve Judd in *Guns in the Afternoon*, Pike Bishop in *The Wild Bunch*, and the eponymous hero of *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* are all individuals, becoming anachronistic in their unwillingness to change, and dying significantly at the point of transition between an old age and a new. The survivor, on the other hand, is the man who *does* adapt, *does* to some extent modify his way of life in order to stay alive—Gil Westrum, Deke Thornton, and Hildy and Joshua in, respectively, the films mentioned.

My intention in this essay is to examine the central characters of Peckinpah's four most recent films—*The Ballad of Cable Hogue*, *Straw Dogs*, *Junior Bonner* and *The Getaway*—in the light of this conflict between survival and individualism. For it is evident that where formerly Peckinpah has polarised these ideals in two characters who embody contrasting ways of life (Judd and Westrum, Bishop and Thornton), *Cable Hogue*, though in the last analysis not a survivor, shows the first signs of that adaptability and opportunism which, allied to a fierce loyalty to their chosen way of life, creates in the heroes of *Straw Dogs* and *Junior Bonner* a synthesis of the two ideals: they survive and they remain individuals. It's worth stressing also that *Cable Hogue* represents a transition point between those Peckinpah films in which dramatic interest is divided between two main characters (*Guns in the Afternoon*, *Major Dundee*, *The Wild Bunch*) and those whose action centres on one protagonist—the three films following *Cable Hogue*.

One of the ideas Peckinpah constantly illustrates in his films is that a moral code produced by one age or society is not necessarily valid in another. Thus the morality of a conventionally 'good' character—Steve Judd, let us say, in *Guns in the Afternoon*—may be implicitly criticised by Peckinpah as impractical in a contemporary context, derived as it is from old, received ethics rather than created out of the individual's own experience in his own age. Morality, Peckinpah suggests, should not be dependent on tradition, or on legislation, or on political or social ideologies. Once

morality is made the province of a collective decision, or of a collective acquiescence in a pre-existing set of beliefs, the way has been opened for the suppression of individual choice.

The synthesis of individualism and survival, therefore, in Peckinpah's recent protagonists is not necessarily a moral fall from grace. Rather, it indicates the capacity of the characters, while remaining true to a central core of values, to adjust their life styles in order to maintain their equilibrium in an uncertain and treacherous age. This concept of 'equilibrium' I intend to discuss later in terms of Peckinpah's style, since most of the director's cinematic trademarks—slow motion, accelerated cutting, flashbacks and flashes forward—are placed in the films to create a deliberate and disorienting conflict of style with the orthodox narrative movement elsewhere; to violate 'normal' time and set up a new, catalysing tension between equilibrium and disorder. It's perhaps no accident that Junior Bonner, the quintessential Peckinpah hero, is a rodeo rider, a man whose way of life involves maintaining his balance on a belligerent and rebellious animal.

Peckinpah's films are concerned with exposing the fallibility of collective morality and with testing the reality and strength of an individual's moral decisions by placing him in a crisis situation: *Cable Hogue's* abandonment in the desert, David's 'siege', Junior's experience of the break-up of his family, Doc McCoy's violent bid for freedom. Moral decisions taken in extremis are authentic and revealing precisely because

they are spontaneous. Since such extreme situations tend to precipitate violence, Peckinpah's films have attracted constant public and critical indignation about their tendency to 'glorify' or 'dwell on' violence. This is an issue which has so monopolised critical concern that it is worth making two points. First, violence occurs in the films because it is a 'fact of life' and because a man's confrontation with violence provides the extreme test of his moral and physical courage. Second, violence is depicted realistically and vividly—'dwelt on', if one likes—because at this crisis point equilibrium must be felt to be threatened or momentarily lost, a feeling which the balletic or ritualised violence of the conventional Western never effectively creates.

Screen violence being the inflammable topic it is, it's perhaps not surprising that, of the four films following *The Wild Bunch*, one has been almost savagely misunderstood (*Straw Dogs*), while the others have been greeted as little more than likeable (*Junior Bonner*) or cynical (*The Getaway*) Peckinpah variations on a popular genre. Many—one would even hazard, most—critics still hark back to *Guns in the Afternoon* as Peckinpah's abiding masterpiece; and the prevailing climate of opinion is reflected in the director's entry in the new *International Encyclopaedia of Film*, where we are told that 'his most impeccable Western so far remains *Guns in the Afternoon*' and the rest of the films are relegated to 'box-office success' (*The Wild Bunch*), 'other principal films' (*The Deadly Companions*, *Major Dundee*, *Cable Hogue*), and 'disastrous' (*Straw Dogs*). In an attempt to redress the balance, it is worth discussing Peckinpah's last four films individually and in their proper order, since the sequence is notable not merely for the unity of its basic ideas but for the developments in their dramatic treatment.

The opening section of *Cable Hogue* serves as a kind of allegorical prologue, stripping its rootless, everyman hero of his last worldly supports and sending him out defenceless into the desert. In terms of the 'survival' theme, it's interesting to note here how many films introduce early on the archetypal image of the quest for food. Just as David is first seen carrying groceries to his car, and Junior buying fruit from a roadside stall, *Cable Hogue*, their more primitive antecedent, is first discovered about to shoot himself a lizard. Robbed of this, along with his horse and rifle, by a couple of desperadoes, he walks off into the desert communing bitterly with his last remaining source of help, 'God'. By good fortune he discovers a water hole, and all at once the apostrophes to God end, the character replacing them with delighted incantations of his own name ('Me! Me! Cable Hogue!').

It's a name that, as often in Peckinpah, tells its own story. The godless half of *Cable Hogue* 'kills' the believing half, and 'Cable' could be construed speculatively as an elision of Cain and Abel. Like *Straw Dogs* and *Junior Bonner*, *Cable Hogue* is about a man who has 'found' himself, discovering and jealously defending his own moral and physical territory; and adopting in the process an attitude of guarded hostility to a society that seems intent on buying or betraying his individuality.

Defending the territory: David Warner (*Joshua*) and Jason Robards Jr. in 'The Ballad of Cable Hogue'



Cable Hogue is a kind of blueprint for the two films that follow it, outlining in picaresque, schematic, and self-consciously comic form themes that the later films embody in a more coherent and powerful narrative structure. Thus, though dramatically it is the weakest of the films, it has the virtue of presenting its themes within a clear-cut, readily accessible iconography. Cable's self-discovery 'out of nothing' is realised metaphorically in his discovery of water in the desert—'Cable Hogue,' reads his final epitaph, 'who found this water where it wasn't'—and in the ensuing identification between the man and his new life source: 'W.A.T.L.E.' he enunciates, half-spelling his own name in an attempt to explain the discovery to a sceptical townsman. His self-reliance is illustrated in the desert solitude of his existence and in his brief, opportunistic forays into town, demonstrating his willingness to use what society has to offer him—chiefly, a legal endorsement of his territory—but not staying in it long enough to be compromised or cheated.

Equally, there is a less isolationist side to Cable Hogue, an evangelical quality implicit in the film's presentation of him as a species of latter-day prophet 'striding out of the wilderness', and also a social instinct emerging in Hogue's attempt to set up a rudimentary community in his water station home. Individually, the appeal to Hogue of the two companions he chooses lies in their basic innocence. Joshua, the priest, is a maladroit charlatan uncorrupted by any real religious conviction; while Hildy, the whore, one of Peckinpah's more sympathetic female characters, follows Hogue into the wilds for love rather than money.

More significantly, Hildy and Joshua are, unlike Hogue, adaptable characters: which means that they survive and he does not. Hogue's peculiar strength, that uncommon loyalty to self common to all Peckinpah's recent protagonists, renders his survival impossible in an age which sees humanity's unresisting surrender to the machine. By the end of the film, Hildy is travelling about in a car, Joshua on a motorcycle; but Hogue dies after being run over by the first automobile he sees. In Peckinpah's films life evolves repeatedly into this antithesis: man must preserve his independence but he must also stay alive, and the films are about the conflict between, or the hopeful reconciliation of these two imperatives.

Two observations in Jim Kitses' *Horizons West* help further to clarify the role of the Peckinpah hero. The first does so inadvertently by making an assertion which seems to me the precise reverse of the truth. 'Peckinpah's characters,' says Kitses, 'suffer from not knowing who they are.' The one quality Peckinpah's recent protagonists have in common is that they *do* know who they are, morally sure of their ground not only in a disorienting crisis of violence (*Straw Dogs*) but in the broader context of a society whose values are being gradually eroded in the name of a spurious 'progress' (*Junior Bonner*). Kitses is nearer the mark when he says that 'It is... the sense of being the elect that can animate a Peckinpah hero.' Although Kitses' book was written before *Straw Dogs* was made, the remark applies to no Peckinpah hero more aptly than to David in that film.



Preparing to attack: the villagers in 'Straw Dogs'

To begin with the name: David Sumner. David, aside from its Biblical associations (the David and Goliath story is an obvious prototype of the intelligence versus brute force conflict presented in *Straw Dogs*), is also, in speculative support of my belief in Peckinpah's moral endorsement of David's qualities, the director's own first name. 'Sumner' suggests literally a man who does sums, a mathematician; and more interestingly, from the point of view of what is arguably the classic preoccupation of the Peckinpah hero, the O.E.D. defines the word as a 'method of determining one's position on the world's surface.' The hero's name has thus been altered from the original novel (where the main character was one George Magruder, a research student in English, not mathematics) to spell out the one aspect of his personality that really counts in the film, his disciplined and resourceful intelligence. More might be written on the other changes made in adapting the novel—changes of name, setting, narrative and character emphasis—which contribute to the transformation of what Peckinpah himself has called 'a lousy book with one good action-adventure sequence in it' into a film that makes effective moral and dramatic sense.

The most conspicuous change is of course the title. The novel was called *The Siege of Trencher's Farm*. The film is renamed *Straw Dogs*. The solution to that riddle gives us the lead-in to the film, and yet not one British reviewer seriously examined, in relation to the themes developed in the film, the source quotation from which the title is taken (and which was, by the by, printed out in full in the press leaflets). The quotation is from Lao Tzu: 'Heaven and Earth are ruthless and treat the myriad creatures as straw dogs: the Sage is ruthless and treats the people as straw dogs.'

'Straw dogs' were used as substitute victims in ancient sacrificial ceremonies. The assumption of most reviewers was, accordingly, that the 'straw dogs' were David and his wife Amy, victims of some gratuitous sacrificial impulse on the part of the villagers. But who is the 'Sage' if not

David—the one character in the film whose pursuit of learning and belief in the supremacy of reason over blind force (he does not *initiate* a single violent act in the film) distinguishes him from those around him; as does, more concretely, his status as a foreigner in a close-knit village community?

It is David, the sage, who is 'ruthless' and the four villagers who are ultimately sacrificed as *his* victims. In a recent article on *Straw Dogs**, T. J. Ross comments on David's 'devotional exercises at the blackboard'; and the phrase is a good one. David's belief in the primacy of reason takes the place, as the moral basis for his actions, not only of motivation by appetite or mindless aggression (the four workers) but of rule by mystery and moral authoritarianism (the Church). Like Cable Hogue, therefore, David finds moral strength 'where it isn't'—that is, in no externally identifiable creed or ruling passion, but in himself, his reason—and the blackboard on which David works out his mathematical problems duly becomes the house's one untouchable icon.

David's determination is to preserve his individuality; and is evident not only in his keeping his distance from the villagers (he won't allow anyone to buy him a drink in the pub, a small but characteristic Peckinpah detail) but in his uneasy relationship with Amy (herself formerly one of the villagers). 'There's women and then there's pussy,' Peckinpah has pronounced, and Peckinpah's women are certainly divided sharply—too sharply, probably, for most people's taste—into two camps: the honest, loyal and potentially independent woman (Kit in *The Deadly Companions*, Hildy in *Cable Hogue*) and the flirt or latent betrayer (Amy, Fran in *The Getaway*). 'Pussy' is the standard emblem for the latter, and the prominence of the Sumners' cat in the film is no coincidence. The only instance of casual violence on David's part is when, during a conversation with Amy, he starts throwing grapefruit at the cat scuttling under the table. Equally, the film's first emotional

* 'Straw Dogs, Chessmen and War Games', by T. J. Ross. *Film Heritage*, Fall 1972.



'climax' occurs when the cat is found strung up in the wardrobe; a fittingly feminine setting for death in contrast to the cat's snowbound end in the novel.

The intellectual disparity between David and Amy is suggested in her attempts to 'keep up' with him, studiously donning his spectacles in bed and endeavouring to improve her grasp of chess by reading from an instruction handbook during their evening game. More important and destructive than any intellectual inequality, however, is their moral inequality. Amy acts irresponsibly—she is prepared to flirt with an old flame from the village, but not prepared for the inevitable consequences—and demonstrates a lack of faith in David that is based (like most critics' assessment of him as a diffident man who comes good in a crisis) purely on externals. That he was not 'one of the involved' in his student days in the States could be interpreted, in line with Peckinpah's distrust of collective action, as a refusal to discard his independence; that he does not dismiss the local workers when she urges him indicates as much that he does not prejudice as that he is afraid of them; and that he does not oblige Amy when she places a bowl of milk before him, to nudge him into challenging the workers over the cat's murder, tells us that he does not take his cue for action from someone else. 'I am not a coward,' he murmurs in answer to Amy's later accusations, and the film goes on to demonstrate that statement's simple truth. By her attacks on his right to form his own decisions, Amy consistently impugns his individuality; just as by her later disloyalty she threatens his survival.

The third enemy of David's individuality is the Church, representing not the palpable forces of destruction or disloyalty, but the more insidious weaponry of traditional morality. The film opens with shots (first looking up to, then down from, the church tower) showing children idly tormenting a dog among the gravestones; and immediately both death and senseless persecution are linked by image with the Church. Later, in his first meeting with the Reverend Hood (a name nicely retained from the novel to convey ideas of darkness and obscurantism), David quotes Montesquieu: 'There has never been a kingdom of so much bloodshed as the kingdom of Christ.' The Church, the film suggests, owes its survival to a stubborn and periodically cruel adherence to its own dogmas; and for Peckinpah there is nothing to admire in the rigid loyalty of an individual or sect to an irrational belief.

Ranged against the village workmen and the Church are the two characters who are, with David, embodiments of good in the film's moral framework: Major Scott, the magistrate and village 'lawman', and Henry Niles, the village idiot. Both are drawn as essentially impotent. One is an innocent without the mental equipment to make moral decisions, the other a lawman without the strength to enforce them (his right arm is significantly crippled). David is thus the one character who effectively combines intelligence with strength; in Peckinpah's words, 'an intellectual who embodies his intellect in action.'

Throughout the film David's un-

Faces of McCartney: as Junior Bonner (top) and as Doc in 'The Getaway'

familiarity with violence, and with the instruments of violence, is stressed: it is Amy, for example, who imports the man-trap into the house, while David's inexpert handling of a gun is demonstrated in two sequences. The point is that David *does* adapt, that he is prepared to come to terms with violence, not only by using his gun and his impromptu weapons in the critical defence of his home, but also, on a deeper level, by recognising the violence in his own nature. The two most disturbing moments in the siege sequence occur when, in a sickened trance, David continues to batter the already senseless head of victim number three; and when, near the end, he announces with a grin of punch-drunk triumph, 'Jesus! I did for them all!'—invoking the instant nemesis of a surprise reappearance by one assailant who still remains alive. David's triumph at the end is emotionally equivocal: he wins, but he also, in Peckinpah's words, 'gets the blinkers pulled off.' 'David was always a man, the director says, 'it's just that he didn't see deeply enough into himself. . . David found out that he had all these instincts and it made him sick, sick unto death, and at the same time he had guts enough and sense enough to stand up and do what he had to do.'

In one respect, the ending of *Straw Dogs* looks forward to *Junior Bonner*. In the closing exchange between David and Niles as they drive off into the darkness, Niles declares vacantly that he doesn't know his way home, to which David replies with a cryptic half-smile, 'I don't either.' The home he has attempted to set up, in a foreign country, has been wrecked both physically—by the siege—and emotionally—by Amy's latent disloyalty culminating in her crucial hesitation to pull a gun on David's last assailant. On this ending, Peckinpah comments: 'I don't know whether they (David and Amy) will get back together again. At least they'll have to deal with each other on a different plane. What I hope he does is keep going in that car at the end—not turn back.' In a sense, that wish is fulfilled in *Junior Bonner*, in the refusal of that film's hero to entrust his individuality to, or identify his stability with, anything as ephemeral and vulnerable as a home.

Junior Bonner is the quintessential Peckinpah hero, owing all his strength to himself, none of it to the physical shelter of a home or the emotional shelter of personal relationships or public applause. He is an isolated figure, occupying his watchful place on the perimeter of the action—he takes no part in either the street carnival or the saloon brawl—and finding an emotional kinship only with those whose life styles, similarly fluid and unattached, celebrate a kind of continuous present (his ex-rodeo champion father Ace, the girl Charmagne) rather than a defeatist submission to the past (his mother and her antique shop), or the sacrifice of the present moment to the future result inherent in his brother Curly's pursuit of material success or the fleeting rewards of competitive victory. 'We could've won,' laments his father after he and Junior narrowly lose a rodeo contest. 'We did, Ace,' is Junior's laconic and comprehensive reply.

Like David, Junior reconciles the ideals of survival and individualism. More than David, perhaps, he has learned to understand and confront their destructive counterparts in the modern world, violence and

impersonality. He faces the demolition of his family's home by bulldozers with a helpless resignation that contrasts eloquently with David's passionately physical defence of his home; far from preserving his individuality by living the life of an academic recluse, he is a man who is willing to make his way in the commercialised world of the rodeo, with its echoes of a debased Western heroism.

The most conspicuous development over Peckinpah's last four films is the increasing modernism of the settings. *Cable Hogue* was set in turn-of-the-century West; *Straw Dogs* in a remote, if contemporary, English village; *Junior Bonner* in small-town Arizona; and *The Getaway* in an urban America more dominated than in any previous Peckinpah film by the machine and by impersonal social forces. The battle becomes more urgent, since the pernicious elements of modern life—commercialism, standardisation, the machine—conspire to render the individual more impotent and anonymous. He can be 'bought'; he can be processed into anonymity by a system (the white-uniformed prisoners in *The Getaway*); he can see his value, function and place in society threatened by the machine (the car in *Cable Hogue*, the farm machines in *Straw Dogs*, the bulldozers in *Junior Bonner*). Linking *Junior Bonner* and *The Getaway* are a score of visual motifs pinpointing Peckinpah's specific grudges against city life—dark glasses (anonymity), stetsons (bargain store degradation of Western myth), transistor radios (raucous instant music), street parades (collective euphoria to order).

For Peckinpah, the only way the individual can survive meaningfully in an impersonal and violent society is to remain loyal to himself, to what he wants and what he has chosen to fight for. The one conventionally 'good' character in *The Getaway* is the vet Clinton who, kidnapped by a killer and betrayed by his wife, can only register the impotent protest of suicide. Survival, *The Getaway* suggests, is for the hard men, the experts. And that the fight for life and freedom is not something to be taken lightly is illustrated by the recurrence of the idea of

the 'game'. Doc McCoy, momentarily losing his cool during a chess game in prison, reacts fiercely on being told by his opponent, 'It's only a game.' The motif is taken up again in the exchange between Doc and Carol as, two derelicts amid the engulfing waste of the rubbish dump, they try to sort out their future together. Carol, idly rubbing a recent wound, provokes the angry reprimand 'This isn't a game!' to which she replies with cynical impatience, 'It's all a game.' The contrast in character is deliberate. While Carol constantly loses patience with the setbacks and humiliations of their escape bid, Doc McCoy is the most single-minded yet of Peckinpah's 'survivors', dedicating himself grimly and expertly ('Doc') to the recovery of a lost freedom.

The problem of *The Getaway* lies in determining exactly where Peckinpah has located 'individualism', that stabilising loyalty to a chosen code of action which characterised David and Junior. Right from the beginning, Doc McCoy seems a character drawn against the grain of Peckinpah's previous heroes. To begin with, he is first seen in captivity, having served five years of a ten-year sentence for armed robbery. Then, almost his first words in the film are 'Tell him I'm for sale,' spoken to Carol after she has outlined corrupt politician Beynon's offer to secure Doc's release in return for half the proceeds of a bank job Doc has been planning in a small Texas town. Not much later, Doc infringes another item in the Peckinpah concept of individualism—he initiates violence. During the bank raid and its aftermath, a guard is killed, explosions are set off in the town, and Doc's getaway car careers destructively through the wooden verandah of a house. Since it's hard to look on Doc as a character whose way of life is endorsed by Peckinpah as were those of his predecessors, one begins to speculate that, Peckinpah having placed his story within a moral landscape markedly more vicious and impersonal than either *Straw Dogs* (with its more uncomplicatedly physical violence, and sharper divisions between good and evil) or *Junior Bonner* (with its more relaxed story and central group of sympathetic characters), the emphasis has to be on

'Survival is for the hard men': Steve McQueen, Ali MacGraw in 'The Getaway'



survival, the fight for personal freedom overriding any concessions to a more generous or creative morality.

In many respects, *The Getaway* seems designed as the cynical obverse side of *Junior Bonner*. It's worth considering, for example, the way that Peckinpah has modified the McQueen persona since the earlier film. Gone is the relaxed, weathered, humorously watchful image; in its place is something tighter, more guardedly laconic. McQueen is dressed in black throughout (except, ironically, in prison, where he wears the regulation white), in contrast to Junior's lighter colours. Spontaneity is conspicuous by its absence, and where Junior acted upon immediate feeling to reveal his loyalties (punching Curly through the window after the latter's insult to his father), Doc's responses are delayed, more self-conscious; driving the car off the road to beat Carol about the head after they have driven from the confrontation with Beynon in which she revealed her infidelity. The most uncompromising aspect of the film's cynicism is its indication that, in a world where only calculation, forethought and hair-trigger discipline can produce effective results, spontaneity is the province of the inept (Jackson's panic shooting of the bank guard), the uncouth (Rudy and Fran guffawingly chucking spare ribs at each other in the back of the Clintons' Ford) or the supposedly disloyal (Carol, Fran).

The film's biggest question mark hangs over Carol. Clearly, for Peckinpah, she is a character worth more respect than Amy in *Straw Dogs* (whose closer counterpart here is Fran, gigglingly betraying her husband with his own kidnapper, and symbolically inseparable from her little black pussy). But Peckinpah leaves marginally uncertain whether her infidelity with Beynon was an act of disloyalty or a chosen means of facilitating her husband's release—'I chose you!' she insists later. Either way, this is the first instance in Peckinpah's work of the director following through a man-woman relationship to an optimistic conclusion. And it is possible that the ideals of survival and individualism formerly united in a single character are here divided between Doc and Carol, their reconciliation late in the film signifying the attainment of a new moral wholeness, and embodied in the powerful image of the two emerging 'renewed' and reunited from the vast, black-horizoned valley of the rubbish dump.

Which is not to say that such an interpretation doesn't beg several questions about the film's other implications. It's hard to satisfy oneself that Peckinpah isn't subscribing, with uncharacteristic modishness, to the concept of the criminal as a heroic social rebel. Unlike Bonnie and Clyde (with whom Doc and Carol enjoy in common a fugitive life of crime, a strained personal relationship, and a bloody betrayal at the hands of Dub Taylor), their deeds carry no public resonance or folk-hero glamour, and their motives are depicted as strictly utilitarian. The means may be duplicity and violence, but the end is their personal freedom, intimated in the film's opening shot of deer grazing idly by the red-brick prison walls, and fulfilled in the closing shot of Doc and Carol driving off 'down their own road' in a lorry full of building materials.

In one respect, Doc McCoy is in the

tradition of past Peckinpah heroes. He is, in Kites' phrase, one of 'the elect'. 'Special' is a recurring concept in the film: the used van that Carol drives away early on has 'Today's Special' scrawled on the windscreen; and the cowboy who sells the couple his van (and his silence) for 30,000 dollars—and to whom Doc, in willingly overpaying, pays the same easily generous tribute, one free spirit to another, that Junior paid his father at the end of *Junior Bonner*—has 'Specialist' painted on his vehicle's side. Maybe, in a world where the luxury criteria of good and evil are being squeezed out by the more elemental criteria of life and death, captivity and freedom, the strength, expertise and courage of the Peckinpah hero must be harnessed to the pure struggle for survival. Maybe *The Getaway's* chillingly simple moral is contained in Rudy's gunpoint threat to the kidnapped hotel-keeper: 'You've got two choices. You can live or you can die.'

Stylistically, *The Getaway* refers us explicitly to *Junior Bonner*. The credits sequences in both films use split-screen techniques to interweave past and present segments of the hero's life. The difference—again pointing to *The Getaway* as a kind of black companion piece to *Junior Bonner*—is that where the cross-cutting in the first film worked to create the idea of Junior's life with the rodeo as a kind of continuous present, a dependable cycle of action and aftermath, *The Getaway* sequence puts the emphasis on the monotony and mechanical movement of prison life. What is stressed is the dehumanising effect of prison, and Doc's getaway is a quest for the recovery of his individuality, an idea embodied in the sequence in which Doc, enjoying his first act of freedom, 'wills' his dip in the lake with Carol by an imaginary flash-forward followed by the actual plunge.

Peckinpah's experiments with cinematic time comprise one of the most interesting developments of his recent work. They seem to me to divide broadly into two categories: the interweaving of past and present events into a sequence designed to convey the idea of a continuous, unchanging way of life (the lyrical elisions of time in *Cable Hogue*, the credit sequences of *Junior Bonner* and *The Getaway*); and, in contrast, the accelerated editing of a single sequence in which simultaneous but geographically separate events are intercut. The latter technique, used extensively in *Straw Dogs*, is designed not to harmonise but to disrupt ideas of time, to suggest the slide into chaos threatening the equilibrium on which individual choice and action must be founded.

As remarked earlier, 'equilibrium' is a key idea in Peckinpah, the foundation for the qualities of control and rationality that characterise the protagonists of Peckinpah's last four films. It's interesting, by way of footnote, to observe how frequently the phrase 'stand up' occurs in Peckinpah's own vocabulary during interviews: 'You have to recognise (violence's) true nature and stand up to it'; '(David) had guts enough and sense enough to stand up and do what he had to do'; 'My dad put it another way. When the time comes, he used to say, you stand up and you're counted.'

'Assuming equilibrium' reads the inscription on David's blackboard prefacing his latest equation. That is precisely what

David does assume; in the course of the film, however, every kind of equilibrium is threatened, not only the precarious equilibrium between him and Amy, but David's more durable moral equilibrium, his belief in himself and in the way he acts. Orthodox narrative time (cinematic equilibrium) begins to disintegrate from the moment when David himself, momentarily incensed by Amy's latest bedtime accusations of his 'cowardice', overwinds and breaks the spring of his alarm clock. Not only are spatial and temporal unities in the film promptly broken (rapid cuts between David's vigil on the moors and Amy's rape), but Peckinpah's editing gradually accelerates and his camera set-ups depart dramatically from the horizontal (extreme low-angle shots of the performers at the parish concert, tilted angles in the siege sequence). Normal time and symmetrical set-ups only resume when David has stood up, has effectively proved and maintained his equilibrium through a period of moral and physical crisis.

A similar, though less stylistically explicit, notion of equilibrium runs through *Junior Bonner* and *The Getaway*. In the first film, it's embodied in the quality of the rodeo rider's skill. In *The Getaway* it is illustrated chiefly in Peckinpah's complex running counterpoint between Doc and Carol and their pursuing trio, Rudy, Fran and Harold. While Doc and Carol's actions are distinguished by their control and resource—Doc's equilibrium is perhaps his 'cool'—the behaviour of their vindictive pursuers is characterised by its lack of balance, its quality of mindless surrender: Rudy either lies impotently wounded or surrenders to paroxysms of mirth or lust with Fran; Fran surrenders eagerly to any available form of sensual gratification (sex, food, transistor music); Harold surrenders in his silent, impotent despair to a bathroom suicide.

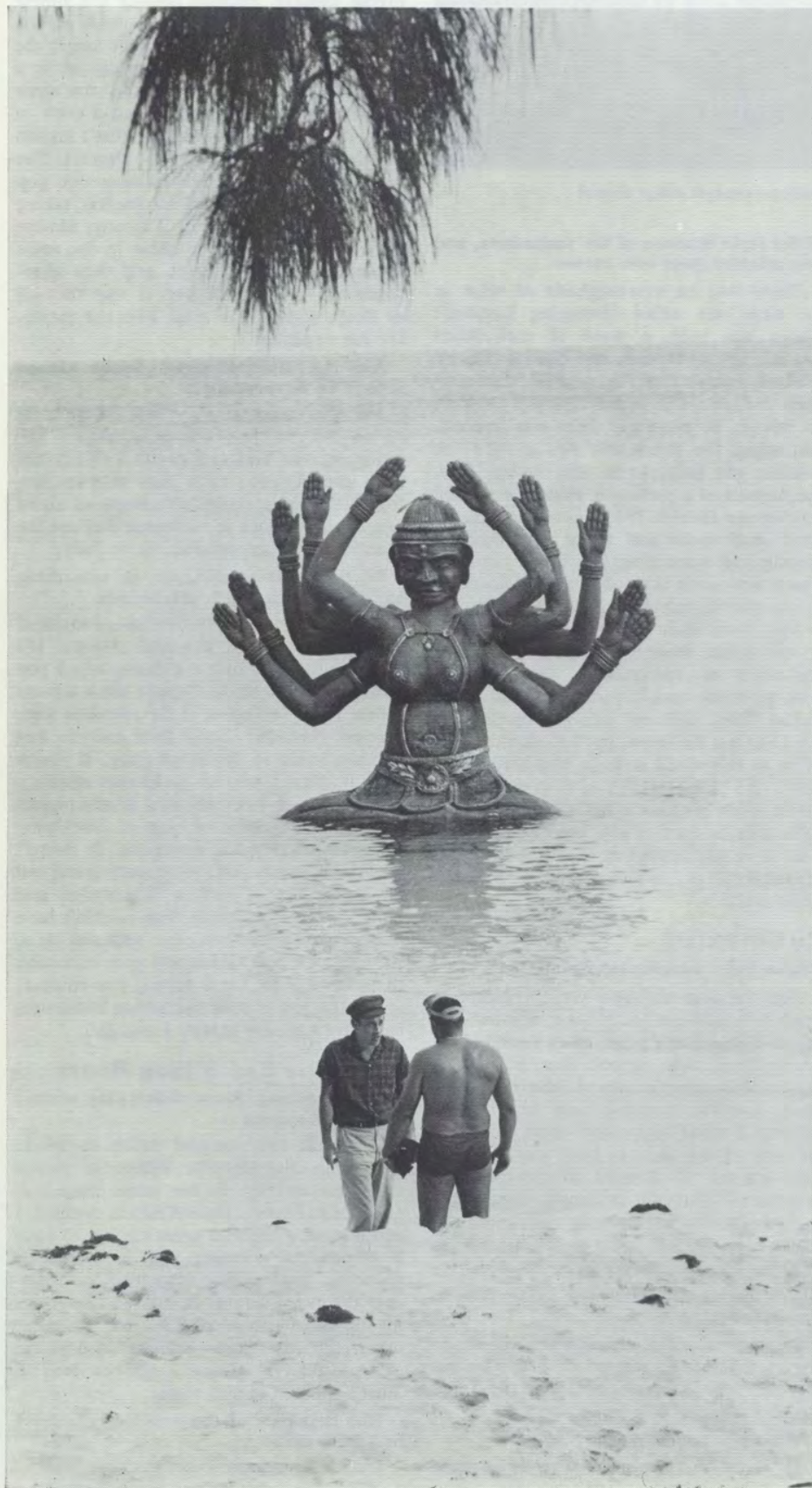
The Peckinpah hero is distinguished by his ability to 'stand up', to maintain equilibrium, to remain loyal before all else to his own survival and individuality. This is not, as detractors of Peckinpah would have us believe, a latter-day Nietzschean moral system, predicating a hero of superior intelligence who ruthlessly overrides those weaker or less resourceful than himself. The point about David and Junior Bonner is that they do not impose their individuality on others, their beliefs, their values, their wants; they do not, on the one hand, initiate aggression, nor on the other, do they neglect their loyalty to those whose interests are linked to theirs and whose survival is precious to them. Peckinpah, defending himself against the charges of 'fascism' invoked by some critics after the appearance of *Straw Dogs*, had this to say: 'If I'm a fascist because I believe that men are not created equal, then all right, I'm a fascist. But I detest the term and I detest the kind of reasoning that labels that point of view fascist. I'm not an anti-intellectual but I'm against the pseudo-intellectuals who roll like dogs in their own verbal diarrhoea and call it purpose and identity. An intellectual who embodies his intellect in action, that's a real human being.'

Quotations from Sam Peckinpah in this article are taken from an interview in 'Playboy', August 1972.

RUNNING, JUMPING AND STANDING STILL

AN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD LESTER

Joseph
McBride



Like many *cinéphiles*, I'd been wondering how Richard Lester has been doing. Since *The Bed Sitting Room* in 1969, his work has been confined to television commercials. One cherished film project, a spectacular adaptation of George Macdonald Fraser's novel *Flashman*, was cancelled by United Artists a month away from shooting in 1970, after Lester had spent more than a year in preparation. 'The Day of the Lesteroid', as Manny Farber called it, had come and gone, leaving a permanent imprint on everyone's filmic consciousness, but leaving the man himself temporarily stranded. When I met Lester in January at his office in Twickenham Studios, he was visibly anxious to get rolling on a new film tentatively scheduled for late March, in Hungary—*The Three Musketeers*.

Fraser was writing the script, his first, and Lester was heavily involved in period research. Also in cinematic research: the day after the interview, I went to the Academy Cinema to see the 1921 Douglas Fairbanks *Three Musketeers*, and there was Lester. His scholarship in listing the various film versions of the tale was impeccable, down to a footnote: 'Rumour has it that there is also a Three Stooges version, but I haven't run across it yet.' An inkling of the tone of the Lester version came when the 'All for one and one for all' title flashed on the screen and he was heard to mutter, 'And every man for himself.'

A man who approaches comedy with the gravity of a monk at prayer, Lester confirmed my theory that directors physically resemble their movies. Sitting tautly on the edge of his chair, dressed with too much elegance to be completely mod, large eyes staring out of a kind and haunted face, releasing words with the painstaking care of one who profoundly distrusts speech, he began by cautiously wading into the topic of *The Three Musketeers*.

RICHARD LESTER: You look a bit of a fool, don't you, having talked at length about a project which eventually becomes abandoned, or which someone else makes and does much better than you could. Genuinely, there's no cast at the moment, the script is only starting to be written, and my ideas are nebulous, to say the least.

Have you read the Dumas original? Very few people have; it's always the children's abridged version. It's 700 pages, and it's really fascinating. Very objective—it treats d'Artagnan as a fool, and the Musketeers are wildly mercenary. Typical Frenchmen. They'll fight for queen and country provided they draw enough money to look pretty. I'm going to make the film set quite purely in its social structure . . . how did people talk? what did they eat? how did they brush their teeth? The Musketeers' whole life was concerned with money, yet they weren't German mercenaries. They fought not to make money but for a rather outdated system of honour which existed until they actually started to fight. Then they would kick each other in their private parts, thinking that was perfectly all right, and would very graciously pick the fellow up afterwards.

In *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* I tried a little bit to understand

'Help!': Lester on the beach



'A Hard Day's Night': 'there was such a wave of enthusiasm towards things British . . .'

what it must have been like to lead an ordinary, boring life in Rome, and I hope to show in *Three Musketeers* what it must have been like to have to survive—what it meant having no sanitation, or what food you had when you were a lackey or a servant. What would your life expectancy have been? They didn't realise when *The Three Musketeers* took place that blood circulated from the heart; that was discovered the year afterwards. So if you run somebody through in the field and want to be honourable and try to help him survive, what would you think of? You wouldn't put a tourniquet on, you wouldn't try to stop the bleeding. As far as you knew, the blood came from your head. It's this that I find exciting. I think everything has to be images, and one has to try to study and learn as much as possible.

For a few years, you were a sort of watchword in film style; then we went through a period when the style became so common that there were imitations of you all over television. How does it feel to be the originator of a trend and then see it wash over you?

I didn't really care, because in my own deluded way—I must underline delusion—the style was purely secondary. The content was more important than the form. And therefore if someone used the form, the Monkees or anybody else, it didn't matter. I never felt the style was that original, anyway. I'm perfectly prepared to be considered eclectic. And I don't see a common style running through my films: other people may see it, but I found there were certain problems that had to be solved in one way in one film and one way in another.

I remember going to see *You're A Big Boy Now*, having been told that it was, theoretically, a copy. I had already seen bits of the Monkees' television show where they were actually pushing a bed through the streets, I mean quite specifically taking gag for gag, so I didn't feel that *You're A Big Boy Now* was totally derivative. I felt that it was probably trying to solve the same sort of problems as I was. Apart from everything else, I was very busy and happy in being able to do what I wanted. If other people were doing it at the same time, fine.

The trouble was that people became tired

of the style because of the imitations, and that affected your own career.

There was an overemphasis on what at the time was called 'Swinging London'. There was such a wave of enthusiasm towards things British, the Beatles, British football, British clothing, anything that anybody did here, that apparently you couldn't go wrong. So naturally there was overkill, and when the pendulum swung back the reaction was going to be very strong. Also, the periods of a particular trend are getting shorter and shorter. We've gone through the 1930s and 1940s and 1950s as a wave of nostalgia in something like three years, so watch out—soon the 1980s will be nostalgic before they've happened.

Also, from *How I Won the War* onwards I was doing things which, to me, have absolutely no recognisable stylistic links with anything else. To me they had intellectual links, and my attitude towards all the films was the same, but I think the worst thing in the world is for a film director to chart his progress. You'll never make better films because it has to fit the genre. 'Will this be part of my work?' and 'Can I see it in my listings at the back of a film biography?' . . . You know, then you'll never make it.

Commercials

You've been working in commercials . . .

For the last thirteen years. Always. I think it's unwise to do one without the other. There was a point when I made two, nearly three films in one year, but I still made fifty commercials. I find it a very good way to practise and experiment, because I never had either money or time on most of my films to have any technical tests started. So I used advertising films as a means of trying lab processing, trying to learn about the various new machines that were available, new lenses, new ways of doing anything. It's a free ride.

Are the commercials you make seen in America?

I suppose about three were shown in America. I made a rather odd L & M commercial. John Schlesinger, Karel Reisz and I each made one of a series.

What was yours like?

It was like *Marienbad*. Why they came

to me I don't know. They said they wanted something which was absolutely me and suggested something which was absolutely Resnais. But, eclectic to the end, I sort of pitched in.

Mostly I work for Italian television. They're not really commercials; you do two minutes of entertainment, to which you then stick on thirty seconds of advertising. You have a completely free hand, within reason, to do what you want in the two minutes. Silent comedy sketches and so on. You have to work quickly and you have to invent quickly, because usually it's almost an ad lib session. It's easy to think of one two-minute sketch of four people lost in the desert, but when you have to do ten in a row with the same people and the same desert and not many props and a crew of four, it's very good practice. What's known as thinking on your feet at 120 degrees. The last series was on Italy's number one pop star, a boy named Massimo Ranieri, taking him into small towns in Tuscany, filming the setting up of a pop show in the main square. He sings at night, and then afterwards the commercial part is that they all sit down and have a meal with the mayor. It's for a spaghetti.

Are the entertainment things always related to the product?

No; they mustn't be, by law. There must be no discernible connection between the entertainment and the product. They are only shown once and then they're destroyed. They're shown in groups of about five at nine o'clock at night and they are the number one rated programme in Italy.

I'd find it depressing to do something and have to destroy it afterwards.

I don't know why, in this case, because it is work which is a technical exercise. It's like doing sketches for a painting which you eventually hope to do. I don't think anyone would feel very upset if the sketches were burned, provided in the final analysis that you were able to do the painting. If you're a tennis player, you hit backhands against a wall. It's a marvellous way of sharpening up your backhand, a means of developing and controlling your technique. It doesn't do you as much good as actually going out on the Centre Court at Wimbledon and playing, but it is useful. You couldn't have a three-year lay-off and just walk out on to the Centre Court and expect your backhand to work. By the same token, you couldn't spend the rest of your life hitting backhands against a wall. Or at least I couldn't.

After The Bed Sitting Room

The Bed Sitting Room didn't play around much in America . . .

It didn't play around much anywhere except in Scandinavia, where it played fairly successfully. It has never played in Italy, or in France. United Artists decided, I suppose, that the film wasn't going to have a commercial success, and it would be spending good money after bad, or whatever the expression is. It showed two weeks in one cinema in New York and got some extraordinarily good reviews and some extraordinarily bad ones, and that was it. That's the end of it, I think.

Was that part of the problem you have had since then?

Oh, I should think so, yes. It's part of

everyone's problem. If you make a film that is not commercially successful, it is infinitely harder to make other films . . . especially if those films don't fit into established formulas of film-making and are expensive.

It's a shame, because in the old days a director could afford a commercial failure or two and he would always have a next film.

Not only is it a shame, but I think it's very dangerous from everyone's point of view. I'm very pleased to have commercials, so that I don't need to make a film just for the sake of making it. Apart from it being emotionally impossible for me—I wouldn't have the strength and stamina to get up every morning for three months and to physically go out and shoot something that I didn't really care about. My legs would fall off.

In the last three years, then, you have been offered a lot of projects that just didn't interest you?

Quite a lot, yes. One doesn't want to sound arrogant, but there have been films to do. A problem is that I prefer not to work in America, and some of the nicest and most interesting projects would have involved working there. *Petulia* was my response to going back there for the first time in fifteen years, more or less, and I've done it and I wouldn't want to do it again. Also, I'm not really able to make a film if I feel that there is someone else who could make it infinitely better than I could.

You can probably gather from this that I'm not really a professional, a craftsman, in the aesthetic sense of film-making. I could never be a contract director. I'd like to consider myself reasonably craftsmanlike in the actual technique of it; I know and care about that. But I can only make films if I feel that I can contribute something. In this best of all possible worlds, you don't make films for yourself or for the audience; you make them for the sake of the film, for the sake of the subject.

Do you have plans for any other films?

There's a film which I hope to do after *Three Musketeers*, something I've been messing about with for a number of years, which is just a traveller going to a very strange country. That is the only one I have more than the vaguest plans about.

The tone of *The Bed Sitting Room* struck me as very curious. It seemed an almost enjoyable life the people were leading—rather jolly. I found the film very funny, but I had a hard time taking some of the satire seriously. The tone seemed so flippant.

I would never use the word flippant. I agree that it was trying to use comedy in as serious a way as possible, as I think I have tried all along to do, but I wasn't attempting to be flippant. I think the film is in many ways a failure. I don't think that finally it had enough . . . enough, if I can use enough as a noun, to carry through the limited resources of a desolate landscape. That's a bit clumsy, but it's a film which started with the premise that there was nothing, because everything had been destroyed, and I found it very difficult to create a sustained visual and emotional interest, to produce a sense of tension and of time, to produce constantly new images and new outlooks. You couldn't suddenly

think of something to do with a telephone, because there *were* no telephones.

I felt that the first third of the film worked, it set up the premises quite nicely, but the second third sagged very badly. I knew this at the time and was rather helpless. In fact, I wasn't clever enough to get enough going, to make you constantly care for these people who were, after all, not behaving in a rational way. I think it's a very sad film; it was *intended* to be a very sad film. I wanted to use slapstick devices to parallel the unmentionable or the unshowable. I just didn't have the intellectual strength to sustain it.

It was an irrational, illogical life they were leading, and one of the theories behind it was that if you try to explode the Establishment, to stick a bomb under it, what breaks? What is left? Pieces of Doric and Ionic columns. They are perfectly formed fragments which behave exactly as little pieces of that structure. Just blowing it up doesn't produce a transformation. And those people, those twenty tiny fragments of that civilisation, were behaving precisely as if there had never been the destruction. The same prejudices, the same flippancy on their part, the same lack of thought, the same banality—if that gave a flippant tone, that was intentional. I wouldn't want to make a comedy which was just funny, just for its own sake, because I think comedy is the strongest possible weapon in trying to produce a hoped for sense of involvement with an audience.

War Films

Could you tell me about *Flashman*?

Flashman was one of the more successful abortive projects. It's a very complicated situation, but *Flashman* came about at the time when the film industry began to collapse within itself. A sort of implosion. It's a very expensive project, a period film where at one point 13,000 of the British Army have to retreat in January from Kabul into India, being attacked by hordes of

Afghans. It's not the sort of thing that you can do on a shoestring. I mean, apart from the logistical problem of how do you get, let's say, 5,000 people under the snow so that the next morning they appear on cue as the bugle arises in this empty snowfield, blows a few notes, and then slowly 5,000 heads appear . . . To do it properly it would be a very expensive film; and I don't think one should do it improperly.

What attracted you to the subject?

It was an extraordinary period of British history and it was a marvellously interesting premise: *Flashman*, the bully from *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, was the only fictional character in a piece of really rather clever historical research by George MacDonald Fraser. Almost every other character was taken from the diaries of the time. *Flashman* became the survivor of the English retreat of 1842, where in fact out of 11,000 or 13,000 people, only one survived. There were lots of things in it that made sense to me—about soldiering, about the military, about the economics of military politics. And I also had various notions about the Victorian ethic and the Protestant, John Foster Dulles ethic and the relationship of one to the other. . .

Have you seen any films about war since you made *How I Won the War* which you found interesting?

Well, *M*A*S*H*, because I thought it was an extraordinarily *pro-war* film, and very funny and technically very interesting. What else? *Oh! What a Lovely War* I felt was so full of nostalgia that in effect it had the haunting wish-fulfilment of *Genevieve* with guns. I didn't feel desperate in any way, although I did at the play.

What about *The Charge of the Light Brigade*?

I liked it a great deal. I loved the inconsequential, boring, pedantic anti-climax of the actual charge. And the characters, like Gielgud's Raglan—you realise, if you've done a reasonable amount of research on that period, that they behaved *exactly* like

'The Bed Sitting Room': 'if you try to explode the Establishment . . . what breaks, what is left?'



that, *Flashman* is based a lot on that sort of character. They behaved in ways that you wouldn't believe.

One general was in a fort in Kabul with one of his aides when an earthquake struck. The aide asked, 'What should we do?' and the general said, 'I think we'd better leave.' They both ran down the stairs, and as they got to the bottom the building collapsed. Twenty minutes later, when they'd recovered, the general put the other man on court-martial because he'd run down the stairs in front of him. When you examine these people, they were cardboard. First quality British cardboard.

Naive Optimism

You said something a few years ago which I'd like to throw back at you: 'I don't really have any desire for any of my films to go into time capsules. And I expect *A Hard Day's Night*, which I haven't seen for a year, to be absolutely dreadful now, because it was of that period, of the pop explosion.' Do you really mean that something is dreadful because it is dated? I think films are actually better when they strongly reflect the time in which they were made.

I don't believe people should take films all that seriously. I know that's a terrible attitude, because it puts you out of part of your job, but I think films are to be made and to be seen and not to be taken quite so much as objects to be cherished. I think they are disposable objects. They are as valuable because of their craftsmanship as pieces of period furniture, and they should be taken with as much seriousness or lack of seriousness. I think there is a danger if we expect so much of films. It's awful because it's all I can do, and I would hate to think that when I went through my life the only things I can leave behind are the bad manners of my children and these tins of film which represent my deep feelings and my shallow thoughts.

There is a danger in even concerning ourselves with whether a film is or is not dated. Of course it's dated. *A Hard Day's Night* was a film which set out to mirror a point in time, a fictionalised documentary representing an enormous change in the social structure of this country. *How I Won the War* was made about my feelings towards the Vietnam war, and the nostalgia about war and war films in 1965 or 1966. It means totally different things now because look what we've learned. Look how the world has moved on in its cynical or nonsensical way to make that not valuable, that type of film. The Beatles picture is dated, if you like, by its naive optimism. But that is precisely because one felt naively optimistic at that time, despite the fact that it happened a year before the Kennedy assassination, not long after the Bay of Pigs. In hindsight, I suppose there was nothing to be optimistic about. But people were.

Do you think that people today have less of a sense of humour?

I don't think there is any change in the amount of humour available to us. I think there is a sense of overall optimism or pessimism in the world, and that it runs in cycles. From the early 1960s there was perhaps a sense of optimism, which was totally dashed by around 1967. We are still in that trench of pessimism; it's now been

numbered to apathy. Most of Western civilisation is totally apathetic and is waiting for some upsurge to lift it out. When you think that just on the lowest levels, there's been no new change in appearance in five years, in clothing, in drama, in music, in art, nothing as far as I can see has happened. We've just been marking time in a rather sad way, sinking into various little bomb craters of depression, waiting for the future to kick us out again.

Actors and Methods

Are there any actors or actresses you'd like to work with?

It's very important not to go around looking for a vehicle for a person. I'd admired George Scott from the time I saw him in *The Andersonville Trial*, and thought it would be nice to work with him. When *Petulia* came up there was a part, and I thought he would be the best person for that part. But my decision, before I thought of George Scott, was to take *Petulia* and turn it upside down, because the book was quite the reverse of what the film was. I think it's very important to concentrate on why you want to make a particular subject, then find a vehicle which suits that feeling, then find the people that are best to work with.



'The Bed Sitting Room': Spike Milligan; Michael Hordern under custard pie

Could I ask about some actors and how you've worked with them? Michael Hordern...

If I could make a film with a Michael Hordern part in it every year I'd be a very happy man. He is an amazingly talented actor, one of the best of the English school of acting, who understands insanity wondrously well and who plays with great conviction against terrible odds. He was thrown into *Forum*; he had never really sung, danced or played that kind of comedy before in his life, and yet came out I think the best. But especially I think he understood *The Bed Sitting Room* very, very well. He understood the madness of *Grapple* in *How I Won the War* wonderfully.

How is Ralph Richardson to work with?

He has moments where if things go slightly wrong at the beginning of a take he finds it hard to rise above them. But when everything builds correctly he just gives staggering performances.

George Scott?

Every moment he was a delight to work with. Wonderfully inventive. A very interesting man; a withdrawn man, not given to over-enthusiasm, but a man whom I admire more than any actor. I think he was well

cast for *Petulia*, against a lot of people's opinion, because you need a strong man to play a certain kind of weakness and indecision on the screen.

Julie Christie?

I found her marvellously hard-working. She would always be letter-perfect when she came to work; thought a great deal about it. And ravishingly beautiful, very nice to photograph. I don't think she's a natural actor. Whatever you see on the screen is darn hard work. She's a nice girl.

It's been remarked that directors who came from television don't tend to fill the frame, that they have a hard time using the space around the actors, but your films are very dense. There's something going on all the time.

It's a great mess, isn't it? I suppose that I do make films work to my own metabolic rate. And I like to fill the frame, there's no doubt, and fill the soundtrack. I'm rather greedy. When I see other people's films that are dense, I prefer them, I admire them. I think *Persona* is a dense film, although most of the time there is only a single person in frame. I would like to make films which have that density, whether it be that there are four different overlapping conversations or whether it's just the complexity of one person.

How much of the activity in your films is really improvised? Maybe we could take the Stonehenge concert in *Help!*—how pre-planned were the set-ups?

Nothing was planned there, but that seems to me what I call directing, not improvisation. That's just the job. You go there and the elements are there because they have been listed on a callsheet and those people are going to turn up, and they know that in the script it says, 'The boys play a number in a field, and then in the end they're attacked.' But once you're there, one is always at the whims and mercies of the military. In that case, I couldn't guarantee whether I was going to have one tank, three tanks, a halftrack, a platoon of infantry, or what. You hope for the best, and on that day they turned up. I took the precaution of having a helicopter there and having a few spot effects ready. I would have done it one way had it been raining, another way had it been a force eight gale.

What I think of as improvisation is where only a very broad outline has ever been produced for the actors and director, and they must shape the scenes as they go along. My scripts are much more formal than that, but they have great holes in them by nature. In *How I Won the War*, for instance, we knew that there were four battles which the platoon would fight which had to represent, tactically, Montgomery's four classic battles, or blunders, or whatever begins with a b. I had studied or looked vaguely at the plans of the campaigns and what went wrong with them, but I didn't know what I was going to do until the actual filming began.

Do you ever storyboard a sequence?

No, nothing at all. I don't think it's restricting, but it requires an ability to draw. I can draw stick figures, but they're not much of a guide or help to anybody. I'm not organised enough to plan things in advance, and I mistrust people who only work well when it's all laid out for them in

triplicate. I like the feeling that I have to work off nerves. I like to get things in the first take.

But you wouldn't improvise dialogue?

No, because I like rather formalised dialogue or none at all. If dialogue is to serve the purpose of being a parallel to the action, then certainly it shouldn't be left to the vagaries of last-minute intervention by the director or the actors. If you're doing a straightforward naturalistic film of two people making love in a bed, by all means I'd tell them to say whatever they felt like saying. But if the dialogue is a rather poetic monologue on the part of the milkman who happens to be passing at the time, laid over that scene, then you shouldn't say to the milkman, 'Look, there are a couple of people in bed next door, what would you say?' I don't think I could easily have stuck bits of dialogue into *How I Won the War*: that was all written down very clearly in advance.

Buster Keaton

Do you admire discipline in a director?

I *envy* it as well as admire it. The only really favourite director I have is Buster Keaton. He was an absolute master. We can learn a great deal about the economies that he employed, the cutting and the positioning of the camera. He had that wonderful gift of using the space around the performer for comic effect. That's very rare. It seemed effortless, that's what was lovely. With Chaplin, you could always feel the fourth wall, you would get the feeling that he would be putting his camera in front of an imaginary series of footlights. Keaton didn't; he was totally involved in finding a place that worked and using what was around him. In *Go West*, the single frame of the cow and the bucket is physically so beautiful. Right there, in one frame, is perfection.

Did you learn much from talking to Keaton when you directed him in *Forum*?

A fair amount, yes. He wasn't very well, and he wasn't able to do very much in the film technically, but he used to tell me how he would make films and how he would preview them. How when a scene wouldn't quite work, it wasn't a question of going back and recutting it, but of throwing the whole thing out and shooting a complete new sequence. He didn't fiddle about, which is in many ways very correct. It was possible in his day because everyone was under a 52-week contract and all it cost was the raw stock and the petrol for the cars. He wasn't the kind of man who gave advice. He was a very modest, relaxed man who loved the craftsmanship of his work.

Have you any particular favourites among his films?

Our *Hospitality* and *The General*, I think, and *Cops*. *The General* is closest to being technically perfect: it isn't the most uniformly funny, but I find it a masterpiece in terms of economy. *The Navigator* is wondrously good. I sit and watch, thinking, 'Christ! How did he manage that?' For hysterical laughter it's hard to beat Laurel and Hardy, who are just throwing 87 pies or just trying to get that car to come apart, but with Keaton the ingenuity of a gag or a device was wondrous. It was the sense of achievement that I find amazing in his films. You can't fool an audience, ever. Any

audience in the world smells when something is real.

Your editing is so fragmented in comparison with his...

Only because he did his better. I believe that the best possible gag happens in one. If you can't do it in one because the actor isn't an acrobat or you can't rig the gag or don't have the money to rig it, then you start putting in cut-aways to allow it to happen. In many ways, what is known as a frenetic editing style is due to expediency. I remember in *Forum*, when Keaton was running along through a forest and chariots were passing and I was using a fast-cutting technique, it wasn't by choice. It was because physically he couldn't run very far, couldn't see the chariots well enough to keep out of their way, so I had to use a double for him and a stunt man was doing the actual running.

So instead of having a shot where you could see clearly both Keaton and the chariots in one—which was practicable, it was only a question of timing—I had to do the long shot with a double, then the close-up to remind you it's really Keaton, then the mid-shot where the chariots run past, then back to the long-shot with the double doing a bit more, then back to Keaton. So you have six cuts where you didn't want any of them.

If you had known that before you started production, would you have thrown out that scene and substituted something different?

I think that if I had had time, I would have tried to put him more into the film in ways that he could still serve. I would certainly not have recast him.

Looking Back

Do you like watching your films?

I don't like seeing them. They hurt; they hurt like bloody hell. At Christmas *Help!* was shown on television, and I got terribly upset, really desperately, stupidly so, because my wife was pouring coffee during the film. I mean, it's *eight years old*; I've been through all the agonies, the making it, the reviews, the opening, people going to it and liking it or not liking it, remembering the hard times, the good times, all that. But I still couldn't bear the fact that now after all this time, when it's just in the corner on the box—'If we're going to watch the bloody thing, we've got to *watch* it.' One knows how awful each error is, how far wrong you've got, and it's very painful to have your nose rubbed in it. I don't find film-making fun at all.

Not even the actual shooting?

Especially not, because there is the element of time and financial responsibility. The most pleasure is the editing and the mixing and the musical recording; I find that the most relaxing and the most exciting.

Even though you don't enjoy watching your films, is there one scene that you'd like to see again?

There are certain scenes that worked better than others... I think the opening titles worked quite well in *The Knack*, and there's a sequence of dialogue I like where everyone is saying 'What about the cases?', each meaning a different thing by it, while they are running up and down the stairs not knowing what to do. I think the field

sequence in *A Hard Day's Night* worked pretty well as it was, and the snow sequence in *Help!*.

I loved the ending of *Forum*, with Keaton's running figure freezing into the tableau.

Yes, that was nice, that was very nice. And I sort of liked 'Bring Me My Bride', the entrance scene, and I quite liked the gladiator sequence, maybe because it was just all mine. *How I Won the War*... well, there's a lot I like. I'm still most proud of that film because I think it's the most personal. It's hard to separate pieces in that; it's hard to separate pieces in *Petulia*.

The only film of yours I haven't seen is *It's Trad, Dad!*. Philip French's article in *Movie* made it sound really tantalising.

It was a three-week pop quickie. It makes *A Hard Day's Night* seem like a work of Jean-Paul Sartre. During the shooting the twist came into fashion, and the producer said to me, 'If you pay your own way across to America, I will let you shoot some twist numbers.' So I paid the £200, we came to New York and shot two and a half days with Chubby Checker, Gary (U.S.) Bonds, and a man named Gene McDaniels singing I think Burt Bacharach's first song, and went racing back and stuck it into the film anywhere. Just opened the tin and threw it in.

To go back to the very beginning, what about *The Running, Jumping and Standing Still Film*? Do you ever run it?

Yes, from time to time. A piece of nostalgia. I think it's the only film that I can say I don't feel too embarrassed by. Maybe because it only took a day and a half to shoot and I didn't even know what I was doing. I can't say that things didn't come off well, because I didn't think about *anything*. We just had a great time in a field.

Acknowledging an influence? Lester's 'The Knack' and Keaton's 'Go West'





THE

BERTOLUCCI'S
AMERICAN DREAM

Julian Jebb

suicide, meets Jeanne (Maria Schneider) in an unfurnished flat in Paris. He makes violent love to her and they continue to meet over the following three days at the apartment. Jeanne is shortly to be married to a young documentary film-maker (Jean-Pierre Léaud), who is engaged at the time in making a film about her. Paul insists on anonymity while he subjects both himself and his mistress to a series of sexual degradations. After his wife has been buried and Jeanne has declared her love for him, his attitude to her changes. He chases her to a large dance hall where he drunkenly takes to the floor; she runs away to her mother's flat with Paul still in pursuit. She shoots him, perhaps unintentionally, and as he dies he says, 'What will become of our children?'

To indicate the difficulties in the film, it is worth itemising some of the baffling images and events which occur in the first five minutes. The opening shot of the film shows Paul under a Parisian railway bridge. He howls something up as a train roars by. But what? Is there any significance in the name of the street, Rue Jules Verne, where the apartment is situated? What is the cause of the giggling complicity of the black woman concierge? And in the flat, what is the meaning of the waist-high terra cotta stripe which circles one of the rooms, like the high-water mark left by the retreat of a muddy river in flood? What lies beneath the sheeted totem in the other room? After they have made violent love, Jeanne rolls over three times away from Paul. Why? The whole sequence is bathed in a luxurious, melancholy amber light; the music enters, surges, retreats—the brutality, neurosis and despair of Paul's behaviour is trapped in the colours and movement of romance. Why?

Nearly every sequence which follows is as dense with references, some of them very much more intrusive and puzzling than these. To ignore them or to relegate them to some limbo area like 'texture' or 'atmosphere' is to abnegate the right to critical analysis. Yet to dwell on them too much is to reduce a very powerful film to a series of dubious Freudian speculations. But it is necessary to say that after two viewings of the film there is much that I do not understand and believe that no amount of careful scrutiny would help me, because it is Bertolucci's intention to mystify, as much as it is to illuminate and affront.

Last Tango in Paris is about a man without a history. In the most significant speech Paul talks of his youth: 'My father was a drunk, a screwed-up bar fighter. My mother was also a drunk. My memories as a kid are of her being arrested... I remember one time I was all dressed up to take this girl to a basketball game. My father said: "You have to milk the cow." And I said "Would you please milk

'It would be proper to put the name of my analyst in the credits of my films,' Bernardo Bertolucci has said. It was a relief to read this after a month of puzzling about the meaning of *Last Tango in Paris*—a month when the European press was in breathless, lubricious rout in which the images and the intentions of the film were wholly obscured in endlessly repeated descriptions of the sex scenes. In her distinguished and already famous review of the film last October in the *New Yorker*, Pauline Kael wrote: 'I have tried to describe the impact of a film that has made the strongest impression on me in almost twenty years of reviewing. This is a movie people will be arguing about, I think, for as long as there are movies. They'll argue about how it is intended, as they argue again now about "The Dance of Death".' She could not have foreseen the mostly abysmal level of discussion which would ensue—though she was absolutely right in predicting that the film would affront audiences in a unique way.

The confusion of response which the film excites arises, I think, from several sources: the opulent cinematography, Marlon Brando's performance and the sexuality are all accessible, each contributes to the shocking force of the film's impact, but simultaneously they can make one overlook the impenetrable obscurity of some of the imagery. I was sometimes reminded of Auden's early poems, where the force of the ideas and the grace of the language help one to ignore the privacies with which they are spiked. In Auden's case the images and phrases were teasing, minute love letters from a subconscious

mind to a desired body, perhaps; or snatches of clever dreams given the dignity of poetic utterance. With Bertolucci the subconscious is the poetry, and one of his films, *Partner*, which deals with schizophrenia, remains virtually impossible to understand as an idea or even a series of fragmented ideas. There is no co-ordination, and hence no synthesis.

In *Last Tango* there is a quite plain idea—it's very nearly a film with a message: sex as an instrument of power divorced from tenderness or curiosity results in chaos and despair. Paul (Marlon Brando), an ageing American whose wife has just committed

UNVISITABLE PAST



it for me?" He said "No, get your ass out there." I didn't have time to change my shoes, and I had cowshit all over my shoes. Later on it smelled in the car. I can't remember very many good things.' This is the indignity and distress which lies at the back of many deprived American lives—from a generally brutal and chaotic background specific humiliations emerge. There is no American 'innocence' about Brando's Paul—he was born damaged and resentful and his solace has lain in his sexual magnetism and prowess. To adapt a memorable phrase of Henry James's, he has no 'visitable past'. This is crucial to the film. Paul's insistence on anonymity in his relationship with Jeanne is no gesture of vacuous narcissism: his belief that 'grunts and groans are better than names' is no less than a statement of his lack of identity and a sick man's desire to incorporate another in his illness.

With a single important exception, we see Paul throughout in pursuit of degradation. When he rages over his wife's painted corpse, when he forces Jeanne to insert her fingers in his anus whilst he mouths obscenities, when he plays the drunken gallant to her at the dance hall, when he buggers her on the floor—on each occasion he is engaged in the despairing enterprise of fulfilling his self-disgust. The exception is the scene

with his wife's ex-lover when, dressed in identical dressing-gowns given to them by her, they reminisce about the techniques of her love-making. Brando compliments his companion on the trimness of his figure. The room has books and pictures. They are at ease with a shared experience. They are bound by an ironic and tender respect.

Unlike his forerunners, Godard and Truffaut, Bertolucci has tended to avoid literary references in his films. Perhaps because of his highly cultivated upbringing as the son of a poet and film critic in Italy he has found such reminders either 'phoney' or otiose. And yet his work is saturated in culture—in history. In *Last Tango* he confronts the decline and fall of America in the last dozen or so years. It is not fanciful, I think, to see Brando's Paul as representing a vision of America's decadence. Here was a country which seemed to pour out more energy and wealth than the world had ever known—the nation where strong puritan will combined with a pioneering spirit of enterprise and improvisation to produce a cornucopia of popular culture. Brando in his early films projected more powerfully and sensitively than any other actor a sense both of the violence and relaxation which lay behind. But neither America nor Brando has aged wisely. The cataclysms of racial

and military disorder which have overtaken the country coincide neatly with the decline of Brando's hold over the audience. The Sixties saw him lend his talents to ill-conceived allegories of martyrdom, which often made him look less like the victim of injustice than the willing recipient of punishment.

The genius of Bertolucci is to have harnessed this masochism to a vision. *Last Tango* is an elegy to the European dream of America, and it takes the form of a psychoanalysis in which the patient acts out his fantasies not to an older, wiser man but to Jeanne, a new European, released from all preoccupations except pleasure. In the course of their fitful meetings it is Paul who does the talking, Jeanne who complies, unaware of how or why he is manipulating her. She goes along with his outrageous demands, his self-pitying or rhetorical speeches, because she is intrigued and physically infatuated. Meanwhile as his madness increases, her boredom and disaffection with her fiancé, Tom the filmmaker, grows. It is surely a footling enterprise, this documentary about a young girl on the brink of marriage, in which she and the director play themselves. Far more real are the melodramatic indignities acted out upstairs in the Rue Jules Verne which has no future and no past.

And yet when, all unknowing, she begins to effect a cure, to bring Paul in touch with reality by her declaration of love, for the first time she rebels, first in confusion at his drunken pursuit and finally in terror. She was his captive, a trained animal, so she thought: now she finds that her keeper is a mad beast and so she kills him.

Behind the opening credits are two Francis Bacon portraits—a man and a woman. The male figure sits twisted, a smear of painted flesh; like Paul, one does not imagine that he remembers very many good things. The paint, as in the calmer portrait of the woman, is lavish; the distortions of the features are not necessarily emblematic of pain or horror, but rather to do with what Bacon has called the element of accident which for him is an essential ingredient of a work of art. There may be a clue here to the puzzling combination of symbols and techniques which contribute to the style of *Last Tango in Paris*. The dream of the fall of America seen in the disintegration of one man calls for extraordinary subconscious resources to be applied with the greatest confidence and skill. Hence perhaps the improvisation of Brando's Paul, or parts of it—which and what we are not invited to know. Clearly the film as we see it is composed in strict sequences, but we can only guess if there was even more at some time. For instance the flophouse hotel which Paul runs is peculiarly insubstantial. And what are we to make of Paul's dying enquiry: 'What is to become of our children?' There is no suggestion that Jeanne is pregnant, and the idea that he is speaking about all future generations appears rather unsophisticated. Perhaps the children are Asia and Africa, the cultures spawned and exploited first by Europe and then by America. But until Bertolucci, or even his analyst, tells us we can only speculate.

Above left: Brando. Above: Maria Schneider.



SLON

Richard
Roud

Above: Medvedkin (left of line) with the crew of the Soviet film train. Below: Medvedkin in Paris with the crew of 'The Train that Never Stops'. Chris Marker third from left.



May, 1968 is the date adopted for the convenience of historians (and we are all historians) for the radical break in French political and cultural life. Like all such dates, it is only an approximation. SLON, for instance, was founded by Chris Marker in late 1966. Its initial purpose was limited: a company—or rather, what the French call an association under the 1901 law—to produce *Far from Vietnam*. SLON is the Russian word for elephant, a fact that will surprise no one familiar with the films of Chris Marker. But under that law of 1901 any association has to have a proper French name; so with his usual verbal flair Marker

decided that S.L.O.N. would stand for *Société de Lancement des Oeuvres Nouvelles* (Society for Launching New Works).

After *Far from Vietnam*, SLON lay partially dormant, until the aftermath of May '68 and the bust-up of the *Etats Généraux du Cinéma*—the French have a stronger sense of history, *their* history, than any other people, so it was not surprising that this organisation to revolutionise the French cinema industry should call itself the Estates General in an obvious echo of the French Revolution. When this hope died, Marker and the group of technicians (not the other directors) who had worked

together on *Far from Vietnam* and had found this first experience of collective work satisfying, both ideologically and personally, decided that SLON must continue; its real foundation took place in November 1968.

Its purpose was clear: given the predominant role of the profit motive, the traditional economic structure of the film industry constitutes a form of censorship which is even more overbearing than the traditional kind. So the need to constitute a parallel film production, on a cooperative base, led a number of film-makers, militants, and other interested parties, all linked by their refusal to consider the cinema in industrial terms, to band together. But their purpose is not only political: they feel it is important that film groups exist which can supply an instrument open to all kinds of film experiment. Hence SLON thinks of itself not as an enterprise but as a tool—a tool to make films which, as they put it, *ought not to exist*.

What kinds of films are these? They began with films about the problems of workers: *A Bientôt, J'Espère*, their first, dealt with the strikes at the Rhodiacéta factory near Lyons. This film, which preceded May '68, was incredibly enough commissioned by French TV. After much discussion, it was shown on TV, but needless to say, the programme on which it appeared was suppressed shortly after May. This was followed by *Classe de Lutte* (Class on Struggle—a typical Marker pun on *Lutte des classes*—the Class Struggle), which was made by the SLON group, but this time with the collaboration of the workers themselves. As SLON points out, the credits on the film (which include names like Godard and Joris Ivens) were more a manifestation of solidarity than an accurate accounting of who actually worked on the picture.

Gradually, SLON decided that it was just not good enough for them to make films about workers' problems: it was more important to get the workers themselves to make their own films. And in *Rhodia*, *Sochaux*, and *Order Reigns in Simcaville*, this is what they did, limiting their own participation to lending a hand technically. Naturally one is tempted to compare *Classe de Lutte*, made largely by the workers, with *A Bientôt, J'Espère*, made by film-makers. Not surprisingly, the second is neater, more skilful; but the first gives one more insight into the state of mind of factory workers than the second. It would be interesting to know which of the two films had more impact on workers from *other* factories.

This raises the question of how much influence these films have on the audiences they are made for. Without massive research and observation, no valid answer is possible. And even then, the long term effect of these films might still be unclear. In the absence, then, of any accurate information, one has to fall back on the effect such films have on oneself. And to me they did seem to work. It is not that they *told* me things I didn't know, but they made me feel the urgency of factors of which I was dimly aware. They achieve what they set out to do—they are, to use current American jargon, consciousness-raising. Or, in Conrad's (better) words—they make you really *see*.

But this is only one aspect of the SLON production. They have also made films

about international problems, the best known being *The Battle of the Ten Million*. Put together by Marker and Valerie Mayoux (they are not doctrinally rigid about either anonymity or collectivity), it preceded Castro's famous speech about the failure of the sugar crop to reach its announced goal with a historical analysis of what led up to this unusual speech. *The Sixth Side of the Pentagon* (in which Marker was joined by François Reichenbach and several others) recounts the March on the Pentagon, how it was prepared, and what followed it.

Then there are the SLON 'magazines': *New Society*, almost ten numbers of which have appeared. Short, newsreel type films, they examine conditions in a watch factory, in a biscuit factory, etc. More ambitious is the *On Vous Parle* series (is this title an unconscious echo of the opening phrase of *Letter from Siberia—On vous parle d'un pays lointain?*), which ranges internationally in its subject matter and is more intellectual than the more direct *New Society* series. But both magazines are essentially dedicated to providing what SLON calls counter-information, an attempt to tell the French what they don't hear on the radio, what they don't see on television. One of the best I saw was *The Pennaroya File*, a hard-hitting documentary on a large factory outside Paris where lead is recovered from old batteries. The film effectively, if simply, cross-cuts between the company's official declarations to its shareholders about the state of the business and the actual conditions of the workers which, the film maintains, are way beneath the recognised health standards. And the company, we are told, is able to get away with it because most of the workers are members of the 'new proletariat'—North Africans who have come to France and who are practically defenceless.

Who sees these films? Mostly they do not play commercial cinemas—with one important exception, noted below. Instead, they are shown on a non-commercial circuit, at union meetings, workers' groups and the like. SLON charges little for the rental of the films, so this side of the operation can at best only break even. If the organisation was to continue to make new films, it was necessary to find other sources of income. No matter how cheaply films are made, and no matter how little the film-makers take, certain things have to be paid for. The greatest source of income for SLON—90%, in fact—comes from foreign television stations.

Their best customer is West German television, with its three channels and enlightened programme policy. Next, as one might guess, comes Sweden; then French Canada, Italy, and Holland. Naturally there are some countries who will not show their films—Greece, Spain—but sadly, England is almost as bad. Among non-Fascist countries, Britain comes lowest on the list. Insularity? Conservatism?

The other ten per cent of their profits comes from commercial screenings in Switzerland and France, and the bulk of this must have come from one of their most extraordinary efforts—the revival of Medvedkin's film *Happiness* and the thirty-two minute short which precedes it, *The Train that Never Stops*. Soon to be distributed in Britain by The Other Cinema, it

will serve to make SLON's work better known here.

My own reactions to the programme are mixed: on the one hand, I find that *Happiness* is really not a very interesting film. Or rather, it is just an interesting film. The last silent film to be made in Russia, the SLON Catalogue proclaims, as if making a silent film in 1935 were an important achievement, it is a surrealist comedy about farm life in Russia from before the revolution through the establishment of the collective farms. Obviously made for didactic purposes, its anti-hero is an unreconstructed individualist; its true hero is his wife, who adapts satisfactorily—joyfully, even—to collective life. Considering that collectivisation had been under way for over a decade when the film was made, the necessity of making it is in a way a wry comment on the success of the programme.

This is my personal reaction, and as with all comedies, it is a very subjective one. Either you laugh or you don't, and I didn't. But *The Train that Never Stops* is something else again. I don't know just how much Marker had to do with its making; he won't tell, and says it is unimportant. But in any case, this is a film to rank beside anything he did earlier. And liking or not liking *Happiness* is unimportant, since the aspects of Medvedkin that the SLON film presents have little to do with *Happiness*. Instead it is about Medvedkin's famous Ciné-trains. Jay Leyda (alone among all film historians, Marker says) describes in *Kino* this pioneering work of the early Thirties:

'The film-train was made up of 3 railway cars, the first carrying living and dining quarters for a crew of 32 persons, the second a projection room, storage for apparatus, and a complete installation for producing animated cartoons: the third car was filled with a laboratory and film-printing machinery. This was a self-contained film studio that could maintain itself on location for months at a time... the logical development from the agit-train of civil war days, and the films it produced were related, but on a higher stage, to the *agitki* of that earlier period. Wherever the film-train was sent Medvedkin and his crew had a several-sided task. In addition to making instructional films to help local problems, for example, overcoming winter conditions to speed up freight shipments, the film crew was also able to produce critical films on local conditions (bureaucracy, inefficiency, nepotism, etc.) that they or the local political workers judged to require their ungentle attentions.'

Clearly, in Medvedkin, SLON has found a worthy forerunner. In fact, a Medvedkin group had been started by Marker, Godard, and Marret as long ago as December '67, with Godard lending his Super-8 to the workers in the Rhodiacéta factory. After May '68 the group got smaller ('This was to be expected,' wryly comments SLON. 'Only militants can make militant films'). But Medvedkin was not just a distant father-figure: he turned out to be still alive, and Marker had the idea of bringing him to France and, in a railway depot near Paris, getting him to recount the extraordinary story of this pioneering effort to 'put the cinema into the hands of the people.'

Three things combine to make this film a little masterpiece. The first is the commentary, which is Marker (I think) at his best, if most untranslatable:

*The eyes of October open wide
Hands take over the work of the eyes
Lenin said: We must know how to dream
And Lissitzky
Invented cloud-houses for a future Moscow
Everywhere, the engineers of dreams got together
In Vitebsk—Marc Chagall...
Take art out of the museum
Offer it in the street
But the streets of all the cities, put end to end,
Are only a gash on the great body of Russia
The only network that links all its limbs
Was the train
Immediately after October
The train began to move
By train,
The blood of the revolution circulated
...
At the end of the 20s
The hard times began...
After the great futurist concert,
Other battles had to be fought
This is the story of one of those battles,
that train, which left Moscow on January 25,
1932, was doubtless the heir of all the agit-prop trains... But then, the cinema was something that came from on high... here the cinema was going to be created through contact with the people, to provoke the people to intervene*

The second is Marker's ability to make a man talking to camera into a real and sympathetic—even beautiful—human being. In *Le Joli Mai* he managed to do this with characters whose point of view he was far from sharing. Not that he is totally in agreement with Medvedkin—precursor or not, he is viewed by Marker with a critical eye, and this is the third thing that makes the film so good. Just as Medvedkin, we are told, was rather astonished by some of the SLON productions, so no one at SLON would fully subscribe to the presumably anti-Maoist views Medvedkin put forth in his recent film *Letter to My Chinese Friends*. And, with his usual honesty, Marker admits that *Happiness* itself, like *The General Line*, presents the 'human side' of a collectivisation process that had some other, less human, sides.

Nor would Marker want to push too far the parallels of Medvedkin with present-day problems. To claim him as a 'gauchiste' because of the troubles he was always having with Soviet bureaucracy would be just as wrong-headed as to claim him as an orthodox communist because of his inflexible confidence in the Party. *Medved*, says Marker, means *bear* in Russian, and you can do anything with bears except make rats out of them.

The train on platform one...

'New Society': French watch factory under dollar domination.



IN THE PICTURE



Claude Whatham's Day

Performance was playing in Ryde, following a week in Shanklin. 'They probably think they're getting a brand new movie,' said Johnny Shannon, the East Ender who had been hired to coach James Fox and wound up playing an indelible Harry Flowers. Aptly enough, in that they were busily exploiting the island as a vestige of 1950s Britain, Goodtimes Enterprises had beaten their own first production to the Isle of Wight. The first week of a November hit by rainstorms, gales and sporadic hail found the crew halfway through a 7-week schedule shooting *That'll Be the Day*, the company's fourth feature; and the only difficulty encountered in establishing the 'period' setting had been persuading the local extras to cut their hair.

Shannon was making a cameo appearance as a fairground proprietor. His scene had come up ahead of schedule and the rapid changeover to a new and unrehearsed set-up was evidently typical of the unit, which had taken 105 slates in the first week alone. The director of photography, Peter Suschitzky, whose lighting style for the film involved bouncing light off large screens all too vulnerable to the strong winds, valiantly denied that the conditions were worse than usual on location.

The film's title (quoted from Buddy Holly's first hit single) conjures a music film, but although vintage Everly Brothers songs will grace the soundtrack, the project is mostly an attempt to define Britain's first generation of drop-outs, the kids who quit higher education in the late 1950s in favour of living on their wits. The sheer novelty of discovering British film-makers ready to explore a large area in the country's

social evolution less comfortably remote than the 19th century almost eclipses the fact that several key people involved have not worked in feature films before. The script is by journalist Ray Connolly, the lead is taken by David Essex (on sabbatical from *Godspell*), and the film is directed by Claude Whatham, hitherto a television director and a former designer. The casting of Ringo Starr as the main Bad Influence on Essex seems like the only overt box-office insurance tactic, though everybody was adamant that no one else could have played the role.

Whatham, whose recent television work has included the opening episode of *Elizabeth R*, *Cider with Rosie* and *Chéri*, explained the genesis of the project: 'I met the producer David Puttnam as a result of *Cider with Rosie* at just the time that he and Ray Connolly were thinking about this project, which I think grew out of their realisation that they had a common past. They're both around 31. I'm older, and can look at the period with a little more dispassion. But from the start we worked together to get what we wanted.'

The dispassion is reflected in Whatham's lucid breakdown of the film's centres of interest. 'Between 1956 and 1958 a number of boys who would earlier have followed the normal path to success suddenly dropped out, before that was fashionable. Something said to them that things had to change... I have a feeling it was possibly a result of Suez, when it became clear that Britain's role was going to have to change. I don't mean they were aware of this intellectually; there was a feeling. They worked in holiday camps and fairgrounds, with no pattern to what they did. To their friends and families they were failures, even to themselves. But

within four years a high proportion of those boys dominated fashion, publishing, pop, television, photography, publicity, all the things which caused the 1960s. If you go through their backgrounds, there was this period of doubt, between 16 and 18. This film is about one such boy, who is interesting to me because we see him in the period of failure. The film takes him to the moment when there's an indication of the area in which he'll make it.

'Parallel with that was the beginning of a sexual revolution. Sex up till then was, roughly, the price women paid for marriage, and marriage was the price men paid for sex. But it was a very furtive business still. Certainly at the social level we're talking about, the idea that two people could openly, mutually want each other was hard to understand. It was an enormous strain, because fashions were incredibly provocative, which I don't think the girls realised. And then the third thing is the change in music. Suddenly very good American music was being recognised by a few, and then it began to occur to them that there could be original British music. And so we have that element in the film.'

Unlike many television directors transferring to the cinema, Whatham has experience of the distinction between film and video. Until recently film sequences in TV studio plays were the norm for television filming; there was no chance to use the film camera as anything other than a video camera, since more inventive material would jar in style and mood with the studio work. A

television play now is customarily made either on tape or on film, and each project provokes this basic choice.

Whatham had directed two television films: *Cider with Rosie* and *Is That Your Body, Boy?*. The only difference he has found between television and cinema filming is the element of greater precision: 'It's possible to think in terms of tracks, for example, where in television you'd look at the time, weather and light and decide to do it in a pan.' He cautiously admits to 'a deliberate '50s feeling to some of the wider shot compositions, which I think is necessary', but it's clear that he has none of, say, Bogdanovich's penchant for re-creating 'period' visual styles. 'You first think of it as a contemporary film, and then see what is different.'

Whatham's major creative collaboration appeared to be with his cast, who uniformly respected him for allowing them freedom to develop their initial ideas. 'We had a single afternoon's rehearsal before we started, of jiving. I thought this would be a good way of conveying to the cast that the whole of the film was people doing very ordinary things. We had two distinct characters: Jim (David Essex) who is very cool, and Mike (Ringo) who is flamboyant. Out of that came a number of things. There was a Liverpool jive (which Ringo knew) and a London jive, and from that developed the reactions of the two girl partners, and the fact that Mike wanted Jim's partner. So from the jiving alone developed discussion of how a relationship was likely to develop. Basically, you find a convention

David Essex in *'That'll Be the Day'*



for conveying whatever you have to convey, and it's never the same convention. In this one, what I hope will come across will be the naiveté. There are no complex ideas; it's all very simple.'

TONY RAYNS

Altman's Long Goodbye

As Raymond Chandler remarked in his 1953 novel *The Long Goodbye*, 'In Hollywood anything can happen, anything at all.' Director Robert Altman has proved this by announcing that his new film version of that novel will 'put Marlowe to rest for good.' The first major step toward this rather unusual goal for the sixth Philip Marlowe movie to come from Hollywood was the casting of Elliott Gould as Marlowe. Altman has been quoted as saying that he is out to cast doubt on the continuing validity of the values that Marlowe embodies: Duty, Honour, Loyalty. Altman certainly did say recently that he wants to question the personal loyalty to friends that motivates Marlowe so strongly in *The Long Goodbye*. The Altman/Gould Marlowe looks remarkably foolish for having held on so long to such a concept. How audiences will react to Gould's shuffling, oblivious, foolish Marlowe has not yet been ascertained, even by the sneak previews held around the United States.

Altman says that his defence of Gould in the leading role during a casual conversation with the producers Elliot Kastner and Jerry Bick, who owned the property, convinced them that he should direct the film. By that time Altman was so enthusiastic about the ideas generated that he agreed to postpone his then current project—a film based on a little known novel called *Thieves Like Us* with a cast of relative unknowns—to work with Gould. Leigh Brackett, who twenty-five years earlier had collaborated on the greatest of all the Marlowe films, *The Big Sleep*, had already completed a working script.

Once signed, Altman continued his bizarre casting by engaging Nina Van Pallandt, famous mainly as hoaxter Clifford Irving's mistress, in the central role of Eileen Wade; Henry Gibson, the flower poet from TV's *Laugh-In*, as Dr. Verringer; Jim Bouton, former baseball player turned TV newscaster, as Marlowe's friend Terry Lennox; and film director Mark Rydell as a mod Hollywood-Vegas syndicate boss. *Bonanza's* Dan Blocker was originally scheduled as the writer Roger Wade, but died before the pre-picture work was completed. Sterling Hayden replaced him and gives a marvelous performance as a virulently virile, bearded, alcoholic writer who can no longer write. Another American hero being put to rest.

This unusual cast is surrounded with bit players creating the atmospheric background for which



Marlowe at bay: Elliott Gould in 'The Long Goodbye'

Altman is famous. For instance, there are four or five nubile, yoga-addicted women who live next to Marlowe and exercise naked to the waist on their terrace; a black grocery clerk who engages Marlowe in some enigmatic exchanges about cats and girls; Mark Rydell's gang, which consists of one member of each ethnic minority, and a girl whose only importance is to be hit across the face with a bottle—one of the three shockingly violent moments in a film curiously devoid of action.

Altman says, 'The picture is a commentary on the Fifties and Seventies—on beliefs then and now.' In other words, how does a man with honour appear in a world without honour? Does he look like a hero, or a fool? Altman had his entire cast read *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, 'the best thing for getting a sense of Chandler.' Undoubtedly, he had in mind the lines about 'how any man who tried to be honest looks in the end either sentimental or plain foolish.' In Chandler's novel Marlowe accepts the bizarre quality of daily life in Southern California. In the film Gould-Marlowe is at a total loss. He goes through the film muttering 'I don't know, but it's O.K. with me' whenever faced with still another example of the Seventies he cannot comprehend, whether it's the yoga-loving candle-makers next door, the earnest ecology freak with her petition in a bar, or the wealthy Wades whose lives are so entwined with violence, money and secret sex. Gould embodies perfectly Altman's conception of Marlowe

as a bewildered, sincere, passive anachronism. But how does this match with Raymond Chandler's own assertion that Cary Grant best embodied his private vision of Marlowe?

Altman expects Chandler/Marlowe fans to be very upset. He usually indicates that the casting of Elliott Gould will be the main cause for rage, but underneath he recognises that his own anger with the romantic idealism of Chandler and his own bitter contempt for the present ('Nobody believes in anything or anybody any more') disturbs his middle-class audiences far more than his off-beat casting. After all, Dick Powell and Robert Montgomery were considered strange choices back in the Forties. After a particularly disastrous sneak preview of *The Long Goodbye* in a New York suburb, Altman faced a small audience of middle-class socialites and film buffs for a private question-and-answer session. The majority hostility in the room was overwhelming, but the director was unflappably calm and polite even when one bitter denunciation drew a round of applause. When a mediating soul rose to suggest that Altman's shock ending, which changes drastically the plot and thematic intentions of the novel, might be the major problem, Altman quietly replied to the suggestion to change that ending, 'Never, I would rather withdraw the film.'

Altman is determined to say his own 'long goodbye' to those ideals that can no longer function in the amorphous, amoral, apathetic world

of today. But Altman might do well to remember Chandler's advice to the complete cynic residing in Hollywood. 'When he has had enough, he should say goodbye with a smile, because for all he knows he may want to go back.'

CHARLES T. GREGORY

Fonda on Ford

In Paris recently to make *Snake in the Grass* for Henri Verneuil with Yul Brynner, Dirk Bogarde and Farley Granger, Henry Fonda talked about his future plans. He has two immediate options: a film for Peter Bogdanovich, *The Streets of Laredo*, written by Larry McMurtry, and a just completed play by Edward Albee. Fonda likes the Bogdanovich script, but thought he would probably go for the play. 'Albee didn't write it for me, but he has announced through his producers that he would like Henry Fonda and Angela Lansbury. It's a two-character play. Now, you know, if that play is any good, you knock them right through the ceiling. If I like the Albee play, that's where I'm going to be.'

Theatre gives him a satisfaction he doesn't get from films, a sense of continuity. He compares the film and stage versions of *Mr. Roberts*. 'Over a period of six or sixteen weeks you come to work every day, you rehearse a little bit and it's done. That's your performance—each time the director says 'Print!'. For ever. It's locked in, it's frozen. And then somebody else puts it in the right continuity, puts music in back of it, and sends it out to Pittsburgh and Chicago and New York and Paris. And if the critics like it and your audience likes it, you're happy, thank you, you get awards, thank you, but you never played *Mr. Roberts* from beginning to end.'

The first time he did play it from beginning to end, in the theatre, was 'the most exciting night of my life, and I am sixty-seven and a half years old. I later did it for four years, and I was just as excited on the last night.' Fonda thinks *Twelve Angry Men*, with Sidney Lumet, was probably the nearest he got in films to the sense of satisfaction which he gets from a performance after weeks of rehearsal. 'Because we rehearsed that for two weeks, and had run-through performances. At the end of the two weeks we could have gone on the stage and done it in the theatre. Instead we went on to another stage, and went out of continuity, and shot it on film.'

Lumet, Fonda says, is 'an actor's director... who has total communication with an actor. Actors working with Lumet always feel that they have given their best performance. But this is not to say that John Ford hasn't got some of the best performances out of me, out of Duke Wayne, out of anybody you can think of—but in a totally different way. Ford is a director who doesn't talk very much. In fact, he shies away from it. If an



Michelangelo Antonioni in China

actor comes to him and wants to talk about a scene, he will change the subject or tell him to shut up. He doesn't even talk to his assistants or his script supervisors. They never know what he is going to do next. But back inside, Ford is working all the time. He likes to be mysterious, he likes to be surprised, he does not like everybody to know what he is going to do next. He does it in his way.'

To illustrate the Ford method, Fonda describes a famous scene. 'Monument Valley has always got beautiful white clouds and blue sky, and those buttes up there. Ford is going to have five hundred cavalry coming over the horizon. And then the clouds come over, it gets dark and starts to rain, and the cameraman is stricken. You know, ready to cry because he has already seen that Oscar on his mantelpiece. But Ford just says, "Roll 'em, for Chrissakes!" So they roll 'em, and it's sensational.'

There was a moment on *Stage Struck* when Fonda passed on this experience. 'We were shooting in Central Park, and they were lining up a scene I have with Christopher Plummer. We broke for lunch, and when I came back it was snowing, great huge snowflakes, and the crew were all standing around wondering what to do because they had maybe four or five set-ups in this scene with complicated dolly shots. It would have taken the whole afternoon, and they weren't at all sure the snow would last. So I said "Let me give you a lesson from John Ford. Put your camera on a tripod and shoot it fast, with the snow, because it's great, the snowflakes come down and land in your eye and then melt. Cornflakes won't do that." Lumet looked at me and said, "Yeah!" and he put his camera on a tripod and shot the scene. It stopped snowing a little while after, but he had the scene with real snow. This is Ford.'

Fonda recalls another example of what he calls Ford's 'Irish luck'. Ford was on Midway during the

war as head of the Field Photographic Service. 'He happened to be there, just waking up in the morning, when the Japs struck Midway. He gets up, pulls on some clothes, and runs up to the roof, taking his little hand camera. Bombs are dropping, the Japanese planes are coming in, and a fuel dump that had been hit is belching flame and black smoke. He is photographing everything he can see. Suddenly two marines come out of the administration building with a flag—because it was still early in the morning and the flag hadn't been raised yet. The two marines tie the flag on and pull it up. In the background is flame and smoke, and the flag goes straight up, hanging limply. But when it reaches the top, as though Ford said "Hit the wind machines!", it suddenly billows out. You can't do this sort of thing twice. You

shoot it when it happens. Ford likes to do it on the first take. He gets the emotion of the first time.

'It was a love affair with Ford for years and years and years. He is not a well man today... but he's working on a project, working with a writer on a script, and he wants me to be in it. "Of course, Pappy, of course," I said. "When are you going to be ready?" Unfortunately, I suppose that it won't happen.'

Working with Lang, though, was 'a bad experience'. Fonda remembers a story Charles Boyer told him about working with Lang on *Liliom*. 'In the death scene, Boyer is laid out on the bed. His feet are bare, with no shoes or stockings on, and they are out of camera range. Lang is beside the camera and (Fonda imitates Boyer imitating Lang) he says: "Charles, when I pinch your toe, close your eyes; then when I pinch your toe again, open your eyes again..." This is not the way. I don't want to be told when to close my eyes and when to open them. But I must admit it is effective on the screen.'

'Lang took a whole day to shoot a simple scene with Sylvia Sidney and me in *You Only Live Once*. It's the wedding supper, and the camera starts on an insert of the marriage certificate, then dollies back, sees the plates where we have finished our dinner, and finally sees us. The scene is what we say to each other, and Fritz was all day shooting it. He would dolly back and shoot, then he would stop and take the spoon from my dessert, move the ice-cream round a little bit and dirty the dish, and then he would do it again, dirtying her dish a little bit, and then do it again. Then he would move the cup this way and do it, then he would tilt the marriage certificate and do it. He would do it fifty-five times, he would stand and blow smoke into the scene or something. Now this is not im-

portant... this is not using an actor who's a human being, who has learned his craft, and who knows what to do. I have said it to Fritz Lang's face and I will say it to anybody: he is a great director, but he is not for me, he is not fun. You must know that I love to act, that I love to build a character and have it come out of me. I don't have to have somebody say, "Hank, when I pinch your toe..."'

RUI NOGUEIRA

Antonioni Discovers China

Antonioni in China? Not perhaps so surprising as it might seem. After the England of *Blow-Up* and the America of *Zabriskie Point* he still wasn't ready to 'come back' to Italy. In many ways he wasn't ready to 'come back' to feature films. The commercial disaster of *Zabriskie Point*, particularly in the U.S., left him without likelihood of American finance for his new projects, one of which, *Technically Sweet*, is only now going before the cameras and entirely with Italian backing.

The long pause after *Zabriskie* gave Antonioni a chance for reflection; but for a director verging on sixty but never more vigorous in mind and body, work was a necessity. What better than the challenge of a documentary in a country which couldn't be further from the problems of Western bourgeois man which have always been at the root of his films? So when 'Mamma RAI' (as Italy's super-producer state TV company is known affectionately or otherwise in Italian cultural circles) offered him the chance to do a series as a follow-up to Italy's new entente cordiale with Mao, it was what he had been waiting for.

As he put it at a press conference after his return from the six weeks

Alan Bridges directs Elizabeth Sellars and Sarah Miles in 'The Hireling'. Robert Shaw plays the leading part of the chauffeur in this adaptation by Wolf Mankowitz of the novel by L. P. Hartley



expedition in the steps of Marco Polo (and even if the great Venetian went strictly on business, Antonioni was after all 'selling' Italian goodwill to the Chinese), 'I felt a need to return to my own origins as a film-maker, to come closer to reality in a direct way.' The experience of shooting documentary seems to have refreshed his mind. He is also enthusiastic about the use of super 8mm, with which the China film (called *Chung Kwo*, the Chinese name for their country) was made. He has been wanting for some years to make a feature film using television techniques, but one of the reasons it fell through (another was the high salary asked by Jack Nicholson) was that the English company who produced the cameras wanted to supply their own crew, while Antonioni wanted to work with Italians.

Seeing the finished China film in colour at a session lasting well over three hours (it was shown in three parts in black and white on Italian TV and in a two-hour condensed version on an American network, the same version that ATV are showing in Britain), the material seemed somewhat repetitive and at times rather obvious. But as far as the Italian TV version was concerned, this was probably due to the padding out of the second part, the result not only of RAI wanting to overload their product but also to appease the Chinese themselves, who were obviously eager to display their agricultural achievements. One does tire just a little of peasants with smiling faces who take us through the whole process of their work, from planting seeds to selling the greens at the local market.

Antonioni was not always encouraged to film everything he wanted, though often he ignored gentle remonstrations from his hosts. Filming from a moving car in a suburb of Peking, he was suddenly asked to stop the camera. Antonioni told his cameraman to pretend he had stopped shooting. The shots were of a new kind of 'Forbidden City', the entrance to a villa that Antonioni later discovered was probably Mao's home (but nobody would confirm it). A group of ragged-looking people in a country lane aroused his curiosity. He was asked not to film them, but he did. They were participating in a kind of exchange market, something which is frowned upon but not actually forbidden. When it had been announced that he was arriving to film in a village which was probably used as a showpiece for foreign visitors, Antonioni shot without film in his cameras. Later he arrived unexpectedly in another village and the local Chairman begrudgingly shows him around, preceding the cameras down the main street trying to shoo away badly dressed people. But Antonioni's cameras capture the bewildered faces of the inhabitants, who not only had never seen a Westerner before but didn't know what a camera or television was. As in the whole documentary, the children steal the show.



'Une Journée bien Remplie': a scene from the black comedy directed by Jean-Louis Trintignant, with Jacques Dufilho as a murderous baker

He doesn't try to push any political message—and indeed it seems a pity that in Shanghai for example we get a tourist view of the city looking much as one has always seen it, even if the Red Light district shines with a different kind of red today, rather than any glimpse into what happened during the Cultural Revolution. When a group of peasants take their 'elevenses' and sit round the table to discuss a point in Mao's Thought that has to do with their work, we are not told in the commentary what they are saying. But Antonioni leaves one to draw one's own conclusions: indeed, one can see from the faces that they are intensely concerned with what they are discussing and that it is important to them.

At other times, the Italian commentary (by Andrea Barbato, who collaborated on the series but apparently disagreed with Antonioni on the finished product) will intellectualise, as when during a visit to the Great Wall (a Sunday excursion for the Chinese family) it quotes Brecht, reminding us that great monuments were not built 'by' emperors or kings but 'by' the slaves who often sacrificed their lives. Antonioni takes a political attitude more subtly in showing us the happiness on the faces of the Chinese people.

Allowing for the conditions under which he worked, and the little time at his disposal, *Chung Kwo* is a notable achievement as a documentary. But I suspect that it will be remembered not so much for what it shows us about China (we are obviously going to see a lot more about China in the coming years), but for what it could represent as a personal experience to an artist such as Antonioni, finally exploring a country where there is no such thing as alienation, 'no sense of

anxiety or haste,' as the commentary says in the opening sequence.

Having cleared the air, Antonioni is now ready to shoot *Technically Sweet* (the title comes from a quote by Oppenheimer). Shooting starts in Sardinia and will conclude in the jungles of Brazil. It will probably star Oliver Reed and Maria Schneider. Pollution seems to be the issue. Says Antonioni of his Chinese experience: 'I took a dive into unpolluted waters. Now I am back in the polluted ones of the West. As I am a pessimist by nature I am afraid there is much more likelihood of China becoming polluted than there is of us getting depolluted.'

JOHN FRANCIS LANE

Australian Revival?

'From the team that brought you Sir Robert Menzies,' cynically proclaims the title song of Bruce Beresford's *The Adventures of Barry Mackenzie*, a new Australian feature whose United Kingdom première at the NFT in the same week as that of Ian Dunlop's nine-part *Towards Buruya Manhood* has been greeted by some as the promise of a film renaissance in Australia. Historians familiar with the Australian cinema's attempts to establish itself as an industry rather than a succession of isolated productions based on overseas money and skill are less confident.

The Menzies regime, self-avowedly 'British to the boot-heels', discriminated against local films through the Forties and Fifties in favour of the imported product, and though the present government is making amends with an experimental film fund, a small feature 'bank' and a film school—ex-Lodz director Jerzy Toeplitz is

favoured to be its first head—much of its assistance has the scent of conscience money, and old hands, of whom Beresford is one, are prudently making hay while the financial sun shines.

For this reason *Barry Mackenzie* ought to be seen more as a stepping stone to better things than a profound satirical or artistic statement. It falls squarely into the category of bucolic comedy which has accounted for the few other financial successes in Australian film history, and has already earned a large part of its cost in local release alone. The Beresford/Barry Humphries script, adapted from the latter's *Private Eye* comic strip saga of an Australian innocent at the mercy of the rapacious Poms, uses all the elements of what is now a thriving mythology.

Since the exploitation of 'Bazza' at the hands of various crafty London trendies, restless quest for the twin grails of ice-cold Fosters lager and sexy sheilas, and most of all his genially obscene slang, all have more significance inside Australia than elsewhere, it's debatable whether audiences beyond SW5 will be able to follow half what he does or says. Though others may appreciate the cameo appearances of such Austrophiles as William Rushton, Peter Cook and Spike Milligan, the last stealing what honours there are with his Earl's Court landlord musing on the headline 'Pakistani Vicar's Teeth Found in Nude Man's Thigh' as he shows the new arrival to the Winston Churchill Memorial Suite.

The same people will probably enjoy Barry Crocker's beaming Barry, and the often sharp dialogue ('Do you know Stockhausen?') 'Well, I've never actually been there . . .', if not the sight of Bazza 'chundering' on the head of his psychoanalyst (Humphries

in one of many appearances), kicking in the teeth of a pop singer (Humphries again) or emptying curry into his underpants as a short-cut to Oriental virility. Much as one wishes the film well, it is hard to see much future for it in Europe other than extended runs at the Odeon Kensington.

There's a certain irony in the fact that, while *Barry Mackenzie* is being peddled round Wardour Street in hopes of a local sale, Ian Dunlop's ethnographic film, also produced with government funds, should enjoy the luxury of a subsidised release through Australia's overseas embassies, the result of Dunlop's association with the propagandist Commonwealth Film Unit. Not that *Towards Buruya Manhood* deserves any but the widest circulation. With only a handful of documentaries, Ian Dunlop has established himself as one of the greatest living anthropological film-makers. *Desert People*, his sparse picture of Aboriginal life in the Western Desert of central Australia, is already a classic, and the new work, nine 50-minute films on the initiation ceremonies of a remote New Guinea tribe, is bound to increase his reputation still further. Made in association with Maurice Godelier, an apostle and pupil of Lévi-Strauss, it has the intellectual honesty and artistic flair which made the earlier film so successful.

In six crowded weeks, Dunlop and his two-man crew captured a vivid picture of religious life in a so-called primitive society which dazzles with its detail and clarity. But while he is primarily a meticulous observer—the slightly comic presence in some shots of the stolid Godelier is almost a Good Anthropology Seal of Approval—Dunlop is too perceptive a film-maker to ignore the theatrical and personal drama of the scenes he is recording. Some of Bruce Hillyard's photographic images rival Tisse: tribesmen perched in a forest of waving poles as they blare a piercing call down the valley to signal the beginning of the ceremonies, priests leaping into a jungle pit to flail terrified young initiates with bunches of stinging nettles, clusters of bark-cloaked women phleg-

matically regarding their capering men festooned with plumes and decorations.

Few film-makers since Flaherty have captured an alien life style with such accuracy, and Dunlop's films, justly, will have a wide circulation. But until the Australian government matches its production grants with distribution guarantees which force the predominantly foreign-owned theatre circuits of Australia to favour local product, films like *The Adventures of Barry Mackenzie*, conceived and produced as popular entertainment, must continue to look to Europe, understandably with little success, for any meaningful profit.

JOHN BAXTER

Akhenaten

Nothing illustrates the vagaries of success in the cinema more than the current situation of Shadi Abdelsalam, hailed after *The Night of Counting the Years* as the white hope of Egyptian cinema, and now fighting a protracted battle to secure backing for his new project, *Akhenaten*. The director financed his first film thanks to the energetic interest of Rossellini, with whom, after earlier stints on Fox's *Cleopatra* and the Polish *Pharaoh*, Abdelsalam had worked as art director. Rossellini read and admired the draft script for *Night of Counting the Years* and immediately endorsed Abdelsalam's application for a government grant to make the film. However, although the completed picture went on to score several successes at international festivals, it has only recently been granted a showing in Egypt itself; and it seems that the higher powers are, perhaps understandably, wary about supporting a film-maker whose interests seem to be centred more on Egypt's past than her present, and whose projects carry no ready guarantee of commercial success.

It would be sad, however, if *Akhenaten* fell by the wayside. With script, set designs and a skeleton cast assembled, the film waits only on the government's agreement to subsidise its esti-

mated budget of 100,000 Egyptian pounds. Its story is set in the reign of the Pharaoh Akhenaten, who, as Egypt's first monotheistic king, rebelled against the orthodoxies of his day to set up a new religion based on the sun ('Aten' means 'sun-disc'). Often described, by no means implausibly, as the first 'individual' in history, Akhenaten rejected the old preoccupations of a religion concerned principally with death and the after-life, and with an all-powerful hierarchy of gods, and replaced them with the belief in one benevolent, life-giving deity, the sun. The film traces the conflict between the increasingly isolated heretic Akhenaten and the more powerful forces of orthodoxy represented by the priesthood and the army, patiently awaiting their Pharaoh's end to effect the prompt restoration of the country's religious and political stability.

The story's dramatic possibilities, and the modern parallels implicit in it, hardly need stressing; it's all the more regrettable then that, while the Egyptian government have recently agreed to back Michael Powell's expensive and bizarre project for filming *The Tempest* in Egypt (on which Abdelsalam himself has been invited to work as art director), their one film-maker of international standing should be kept waiting in the cold. 'How strange!' the Egyptologist Cyril Aldred is reported to have said on hearing of the Akhenaten project, 'a film on ancient Egypt by an Egyptian!' And it's ironic that a country with one of the richest histories in the world has a cinema industry which consistently fails to draw on it. Hopefully, with the added incentive of the recent Tutankhamun vogue, the Egyptian government may yet make up its mind and decide that there might be both money and prestige in entrusting a chapter of their history to a film-maker of proven sensitivity, originality and visual power.

NIGEL ANDREWS

BFI Award, 1972

The British Film Institute Award, the Sutherland Trophy, has been made to the Argentinian film-maker Fernando Solanas for *The Hour of the Furnaces* (*La Hora de los Hornos*), shown at the National Film Theatre during last year's revelatory season of Latin American political cinema. Four hours and twenty minutes of what its makers describe as a 'film act', *The Hour of the Furnaces* has sent a shock wave through audiences wherever it has been shown—in Latin America often clandestinely. A dynamic collage of newsreel, commentary, montage and interview, the film marks a radical new departure for political cinema; a film which extends beyond analysis to invite participation in what Solanas sees as a continuing dialogue which culminates in a call to arms. After *The Hour of the Furnaces*, political cinema, and not

only in Latin America, will never look the same.

Together with the main award goes a special mention to Rainer Werner Fassbinder, whose *Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* was shown in the London Film Festival following a season of his films earlier in the year. Within a very short time this prolific film-maker has emerged as one of the most innovative directors of the new German cinema. Disconcerting, unpredictable, both highly formal and wilfully anti-form, Fassbinder's films deserve a wider showing in this country.

George Pearson: 1875-1973

George Pearson would have loved to have lived to be a hundred—and he almost succeeded. He was nearing the end of his 98th year when, on February 8th, 1973, he died in a nursing home in Malvern.

Exactly fifty years ago, when he was at the height of his fame as a feature film director, he said in a lecture to the Nottingham Players Club: 'The cinema is the greatest, the most tremendously powerful force for the bringing about of all the universal brotherhood of the world that mankind has ever known, and only by living for it, giving oneself to it, housing it, seeing it, and believing in it, can great things be achieved.'

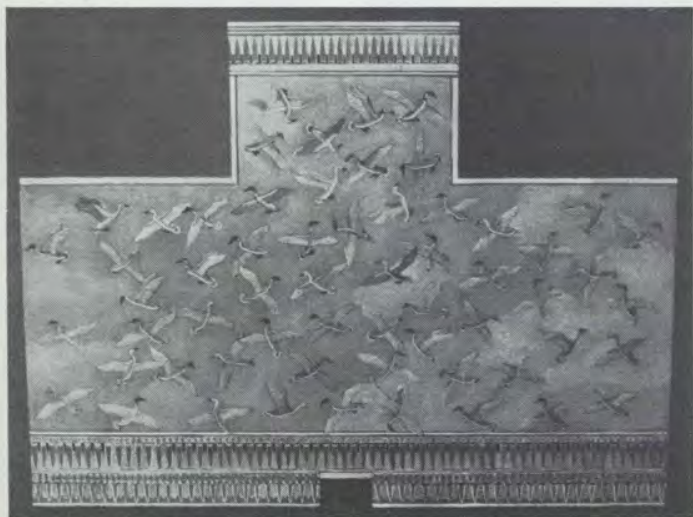
No doubt it was this conviction that led him, at 37, to give up his job as a headmaster to become a film writer and director. This was the second of his three careers. He stayed in commercial film production for nearly thirty years. Then at 65 he started once again, this time with the Colonial Film Unit, and continued until the age of 80 to help train young film technicians from Commonwealth countries.

In the period between Cecil Hepworth and Alfred Hitchcock, George Pearson was the outstanding personality in the British silent cinema. Of the mass of films he directed from 1912 onwards, including *A Study in Scarlet*, *Ultus, the Man from the Dead*, *Nothing Else Matters*, all the *Squibs* films and *Reveille* with Betty Balfour—most are now just memories. Tragically little has been preserved. But George Pearson himself is much more than just a memory: there are so many who owe their start or their inspiration to him.

His real love remained the silent cinema. 'I think there was more humanity in our old films,' he said in a recent television programme. 'People seemed to be more real than they are now in modern films. We were more realistic—I think it was because we didn't know so much about it. That's the whole trouble: when you know too much about a thing, you're apt to put more mechanical effort into your work—you forget all the humanities.' Humanity—as well as a quality of innocence—is something that George Pearson himself never lost.

STEPHEN PEET

Sketch for a ceiling in 'Akhenaten' by Shadi Abdelsalam.
Photograph by Mamoun Hassan





MAN AND EXPERIENCE: Tarkovsky's World

Ivor Montagu

Andrei Tarkovsky is not a very young man although he is one of the younger crop of Soviet film-makers. Here are his career data:

Forty-one years old (born 4th April, 1932). Studied at G.I.K. (the Soviet State Film School) under Michael Romm and graduated at 28. At the school he made two shorts—*There'll be no Leave Today* (1959) and *The Steamroller and the Violin* (1960), his diploma piece. Since then: *Ivan's Childhood* (1962), *Andrei Rublev* (1966), *Solaris* (1972)*.

Ivan's Childhood won the Golden Lion at Venice, the Grand Prize at San Francisco, the Grand Prize and a diploma for 'Poetic direction condemning war' at Acapulco, the Selznick prize for 'a film contributing powerfully to peace', and two further festival prizes; *Rublev* took a prize at Cannes in 1969 for its scenario (a joint work by the director and his fellow-student Mikhalkov-Konchalovsky, who also worked with him on the diploma film); and *Solaris* had the Special Jury Prize at Cannes last year. Three hits, no misses out of three features. A pretty strong record. Add to this that the diploma short (*The Steamroller and the Violin*) got the first prize at a Students' Film Competition in New York.

Tarkovsky's work is not so well-known in this country, perhaps, as in several others. *Ivan's Childhood* is available in a remarkably well and sensitively dubbed version made in France with American voices. *Solaris*, with English titles for the dialogue, was shown at last year's London Film Festival.† *Rublev* has not arrived yet owing to commercial complications. World rights were sold to a French firm soon after the film was made, an English language version was made for the U.S. Who has it here and what,

if anything, they intend eventually to do with it has not yet transpired. Our loss.

I suppose the most notable thing most people know about Tarkovsky is the hold-up that kept *Rublev* on the shelf in U.S.S.R. for several years. The cause of the kerfuffle is not at all clear. Some say it was religion, some 'lack of historicity', some horror. The real Andrei Rublev, of course, is the greatest—so great as to be almost legendary—Russian icon-painter of all time. Hence the guess about 'religion'. This is,

however, difficult to credit, for the religious-philosophical issues remain the intact centrepiece of the picture as released. 'Unhistorical' was certainly an accusation bandied about in the public controversy that flared up in U.S.S.R. when it was eventually shown, and I have myself heard it spoken to damp my enthusiasm by a Soviet fellow-guest at a dinner party. Considering that absolutely nothing is known about the life of Rublev, beyond the fact that he must have been a monk and lived about the turn of the 14th/15th century, this seems rather a nonsense criticism to make of any purported film biography, and Tarkovsky himself has reminded the captious that such a charge would dismiss not only *Hamlet* but *Julius Caesar* as well.

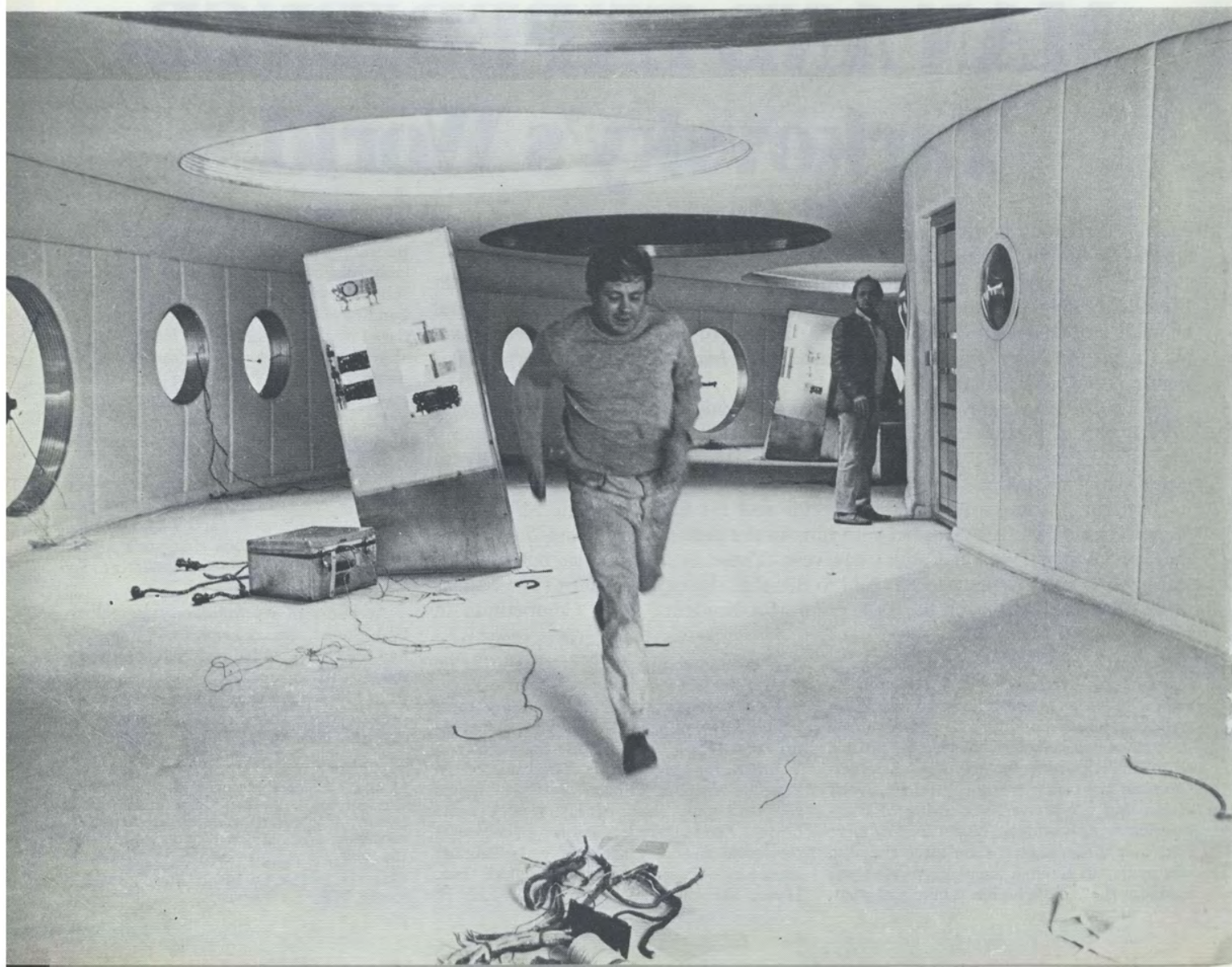
Accounts of its wonders were rife from both Soviet film colleagues and visitors who had the chance to see *Rublev* just after it was made; the 'inside' tale I heard at the time from 'those who should know' was that the censors were shocked at its brutality and that the director was being difficult about

**Ivan's Childhood*, black and white, standard size, 95 mins. *Rublev*, black and white and colour, wide screen, 185 mins. on U.S.S.R. release in 1971. *Solaris*, colour, wide screen, 165 mins.

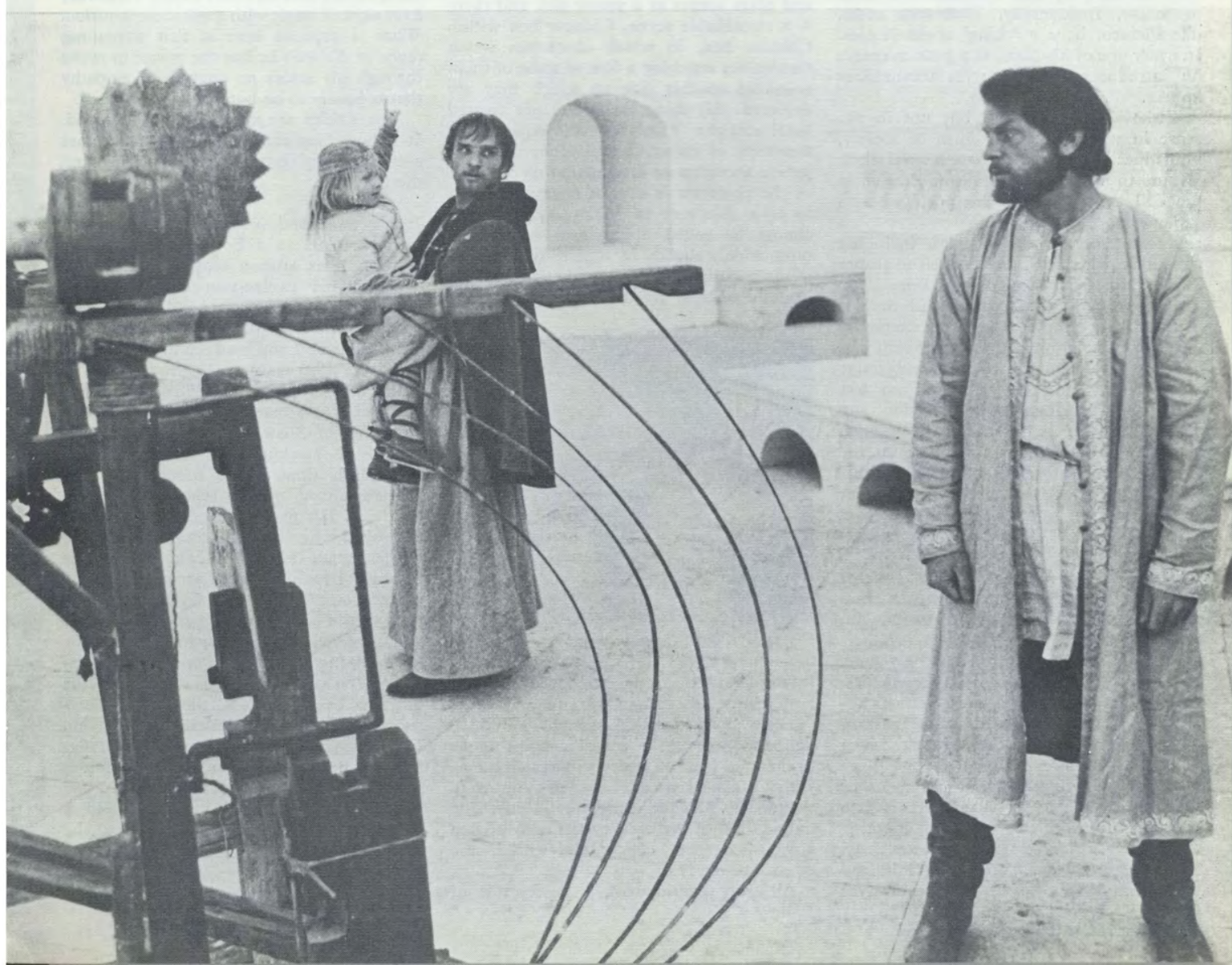
†See the review by Philip Strick, SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter 1972/73.



SOULARIS



ANDRIEI RUBILEV



cuts. That this, not politics, may well have been the real reason is perhaps fortified by the fact that it was freely sold for abroad—not usual with any Soviet film thought bordering on the heterodox politically—several years before it was thought safe for less shock-proof Soviet stomachs, that the cuts I perceive were certainly of that character, and that there is quite enough of this sort left to shatter even audiences used to *Clockwork Orange*.

Before we go in to bat, cold-war-wise, for the woes suffered by young geniuses from the set-up in Soviet cinema revealed by the misadventures of *Rublev*, we had better reflect (a) how long most of our young film aspirants have to wait (or work) before they get a feature to direct; (b) how long *Kes* had to wait to be shown; (c) how many talented young directors here would be delighted to get any chance to work on at all, let alone be put at once on a colour, wide screen, three and a bit hour super-production without waiting to see how his last film—still being quarrelled about—was really going to turn out; and (d) what are the prospects of *Rublev* here when its remains, already mangled abroad twenty minutes more than in U.S.S.R., do at last reach the British Board of Film Censors.

Enough of the career, let us look at the work. To me Tarkovsky is one of the best things to happen in world cinema for a long time. Not everyone can be a Brigadier Gerard, but I tip him certainly as a horse to follow. Incidentally, Tarkovsky must, like Picasso, have a 'thing' about horses. In every one of his films, at a peak moment, he introduces a horse with tremendous impact.

Tarkovsky is a realist, but not in the sense in which, in every form of society, Philistines use this word to restrict their favours to a narrow naturalism. *Realism* in the full sense implies the portrayal and exploration of reality.

It can embrace many styles, including surrealism where this relates itself to reality in content. The designation *non-realism* applies properly to: patterns and designs without any representational character, which may be appraised for their skill and liked or disliked on a basis of subjective pleasure, but are no more and no less reprehensible than any other diversion; and the rubbish misrepresenting the human character and situation that makes up the regular stock-in-trade of commercial cinema, and distortion and exaggeration—however zealous or even worthy—with propaganda object: these are falsehood however naturalistic.

Tarkovsky is a *realist poet in images*: that is, he digs deep beneath the surface structure of his narrative to load his treatment with overtones and undertones, hints, symbols suggestive of and reflecting on the theme. Stylistically he intermixes in his presentation the straight story—events in sequence—with events that happened in the past or may happen in the future, or can never happen, all represented on the same plane of actuality, without any of the fades or trick 'effects' that older techniques used to help guide the spectator to a distinction.

In *Ivan's Childhood* we turn to and from Ivan's dead parents and dead childhood and conclude with scenes that never were



Kolya Burlyayev in 'Ivan's Childhood' and as the boy who casts the bell in 'Rublev'

or will be. In *Rublev* the central character matter-of-factly continues an argument with a senior artist after the latter is dead, and in a place where he could not possibly be even were he yet alive. In *Solaris*, the hero's mother intervenes, where she cannot be, and plays scenes as a young girl, and there is a remarkable scene, Chinese box within Chinese box, in which characters watch themselves watching a film of some of them watching another film in which they are depicted. All these intricacies are treated quite straight. This cinematic equation of treatment of objective experience and subjective thoughts or imagination on the part of the character is not, of course, peculiar to or a discovery of Tarkovsky; it might almost be called a 'modern' style, used quite widely already by others. What seems to me peculiar to Tarkovsky is that whereas in others this freedom often confuses,



'Solaris': Anatoli Solonitsyn as Sartorius

leaving the spectator uncertain what elements are reality or imagined, and in others (among them real masters like Buñuel) deliberately presents a real content to be deciphered from an entirely imagined shape, with Tarkovsky we are never in doubt as to the objective narrative presented to us. The boundaries of natural events are broken only to deepen, clarify and enrich the essence of the real.

All truly poetic work is susceptible of

varied interpretation according to the intellectual baggage (period, national, class, traditional, etc. background) of its audience, spectator, reader. Everybody knows that Shakespeare in every generation and clime can be and is interpreted in many ways, each as 'true' and illuminating as its rival. To take a less exalted example, I. A. Richards in the 1920s set his Cambridge class to paraphrasing a plain poem by D. H. Lawrence into prose and found that every student read it differently*. So if I try briefly to describe the three features of Tarkovsky I cannot pretend that I have got it 'right' or to enjoy any special authority in elucidation. This is simply how it seems to me.

All three have an extraordinary 'Ancient Mariner' power. They buttonhole you and will not let you go. They are not pleasant to watch, they are obsessive and they convince like a hammer. Part of the magic that rivets is the beauty, harmony and relevance of the graphic composition. It is perhaps significant that all three are filmed by the same cameraman, the fellow-student Vadim Yusov, that of the three features the only one not an adaptation (*Rublev*) was co-scripted with another fellow-student (Andrei Mikhalkov-Konchalovsky, since a director in his own right), that all three graduated from G.I.K. together on the same diploma short, and that other names recur in credits for art direction and for music: there is hint here of a lively creative generation. But other Soviet film directors before Tarkovsky have worked magic with graphic composition. What is especial here is that sometimes (even in *Solaris*) he has the power to evoke through his actors an anguish of empathy that is hardly to be borne.

The stories are superficially hackneyed. It is how they are presented that becomes a commentary on man, his experience and the universe.

Ivan's Childhood is a last-war film that introduces us to a boy returning to the Russian lines after a scouting expedition. We see his twelve-year-old waif's face peering through the mists and barbed wire studying the swift-flowing river that forms the No Man's Land between the armies and which he must traverse. Follows a scene in which the boy imposes his will on the under-officers in a situation reminiscent of the First Act of Shaw's *Saint Joan* and, welcomed at headquarters, refuses for the umpteenth time to be fobbed off with relegation to a military school safe behind the lines. His parents are dead, his village destroyed, he himself escaped from a concentration camp—his living can only be revenge. Eventually Ivan accompanies two officers crossing to the German side to recover the corpses of two soldiers, caught and executed while trying to help the boy back on his last expedition and now displayed on the bank 'to discourage the others'. In their task the two officers succeed, but from his intelligence mission Ivan never returns. Years later, his comrades find in Berlin after the victory a folder recording his capture and fate.

This same 'scenario' has been told a hundred times, in fiction or in fact, the

*I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism*, Kegan, Paul, 1930.

young 'Red Devils' as much heroes as their elders, running the gauntlet to improbable triumph (as in *The Feather Letter*) or dying for rashness, like Petya Rostov in *War and Peace*. But this is something quite different. The film is not about a boy's death at all. Not that such tragedies do not occur, or that they cannot be told, as they have been by Tolstoy and so many others, to epitomise—indeed melodramatise—war's arbitrary injustice. The very facility and repetition of this symbol weakens its impact nowadays. The tragedy here, however, is much worse because more inescapable. Ivan's fate is sealed before ever the film begins. He is wonderfully played by Kolya Burlyayev. From the moment we see the wide-eyed creature in the mist, the contrast between the skinny, hungry, sometimes blubbering boy and the expert spy, professional, authoritative, competent, indispensable, the two bound in a single being—a soldier who has known torture and triumph alike, a child on whom grown men depend—we know he cannot survive.

The film has subtly changed its hub from that in the novel (called *Ivan*) to that designated by the new title *Ivan's Childhood*; and that, in the true sense, has already died. The film is not disfigured by the unnaturally cheery or the conventionally hysterical. With one blow it annuls a whole cinémathèque of the war films of all lands. Soldiers and officers, all are reasonably decent—samples at hazard of mean sensual man—all alike are under tension that frays and saps the nerve but against which they stubbornly endure in ways varying according to their character. We know, peace come, they will return to living. But what is there for Ivan? His parents gone, his playmates dead, the burden of responsibility even unto life and death shouldered in immaturity, he is not a real boy, he can never be a natural man. Peace would finish him as surely as a bullet.

This is No. 1 of the Tarkovsky features. Follows No. 2. The first is of a child where he should not be, in the trap of duty-death constituted by patriotic war. The second centres on the dilemma of the artist trapped helpless in a world of horror. Where the first film depended for its achievement on the performance of the boy, and the atmosphere of the unendurable tension, the second depends above all on the persuasiveness and conviction of the atmosphere of barbaric and arbitrary indifference to man.

I have already noted that no one knows anything about Rublev save his approximate date, that he must have been a monk and that he painted. His icons stand out among those of his contemporaries not merely for their graphic virtues but for their expression of pity, charity, humanity. Too often contemporary masters reflected, of deliberate belief, only what they saw in the surface of the world around them, man in a losing contest with devils. Tarkovsky says that he considered the conventional imaginary Russian portrait of Rublev must be entirely wrong—the blue-eyed, fair-haired, suffering saint. To go against the then prevailing tradition of icon-painting, to go against the violence of his feudal surroundings, lord over serf, lord against lord, and Tartar destroying both, Rublev must have been a dark, intense, stubborn and passion-



'Andrei Rublev'

ate man. To dramatise the significance of his 'premature' faith in man, the events around him must all tend negative to it. It is thus not derogatory to Anatoli Solonitsyn in the name part to say that his is not a bravura but a subdued, intense performance. He has no 'big' moment. The formidable power of the film derives, as is intended in its shape, from the appalling incidents and sufferings provoked or endured by those around him. The minor characters in this film all act marvellously.

Andrei Rublev is in two parts, eight episodes dated from 1400 to 1423 with the four central ones falling within one year, 1408. It opens with a bell and it ends with a bell. To start with, craftsmen are trying to raise a bell on a church in the marshes by means of hot-air balloons. A raid of skiffs puts them to flight. Rublev and his companions take refuge in a hostelry from fearsome, quagmire-producing rain. A pair of mounted retainers enter the inn and seize a vagrant serf. From the moment, taking the man each by one arm, they drag him out and suddenly, unexpectedly, crash his forehead against a gatepost, then throw his unconscious body across a packhorse, we are in Tarkovsky's Middle Ages.

There follows a scene of argument theological, philosophical, compounded with personal rivalries and jealousies, between Rublev, his associates and a venerable icon-painter, Theophanes the Greek. As Jeanne Vronskaia* quotes Tarkovsky: 'Unlike Theophanes the Greek, who propounded the idea of Judgment Day, who found in Man only an embodiment of sin and vice, and in God a vengeful, primitive being, Rublev placed Man first. In Man he sought God, he regarded him as the house in which God lived.'

Incidents, visions of the procession of the cross and the Passion prolong the argument. A terrifying episode of peasant festival in which Rublev is bound, freed by a nude woman he rejects and who is later seized by guards and escapes flapping in the river like a great white dolphin, is succeeded by the

painting of new murals in the cathedral by Rublev's group. The envious brother of the reigning prince meets a party of craftsmen in the forest on their way to join Rublev, blinds them, and then encounters a foraging party of Tartars and leads them by secret ways into the town to burn and rape and massacre. The attackers in an episode called 'Judgment Day—Summer 1408' batter in the doors of the cathedral and slaughter nearly every soul who there took refuge. Rublev, stung by the scene to kill a man who was carrying off a woman who had joined his group, sees all his effort in vain. The murals wrecked; the woman, driven mad, in spite of his care and facing the Tartars to protect her, prefers to ride off with them as a laughing-stock.

Tarkovsky, in commenting on the film, says: 'I do not understand historical films which have no relevance for the present. For me the most important thing is to use historical material to express Man's ideas and to create contemporary characters.'

What are the ideas here? Tarkovsky tells us that he and his group studied the graphics and architecture of the period for a long time—many artists contributed to the sets, many real surviving structures were used in the exteriors. Never have I seen in a historical film before so extraordinary and 'seamless' a conjunction of 'period' and nature: buildings, people, clothing, fields and weather. So far the graphics have carried us along through cruelty and catastrophe; we have identified with Rublev. He has abandoned creation and speech. He no longer works, he no longer interferes. He wanders passive. But now, in an 'appendix', the situation resolves itself, the wall crumbles. The prince's guards descend on a burnt-out village, seeking a craftsman capable of building to their master's glory a mighty bell, bigger than any before.

The village is waste, its inhabitants dead or fled. One boy remains, the son of the craftsman, who calls to the departing retainers of the prince to take him on their saddles, his father before dying imparted to him his secrets; he will build the bell. There follows the process of casting the monster bell, as the boy demands ever more and more

**Young Soviet Film-Makers*, Allen & Unwin, 1972.

men and metal and hurries men twice his age to do his bidding. At last all is ready, the populace is assembled, the prince and his guests ride out for the great hour. The clay cools, gingerly the craftsmen remove it. The boy—played again, brilliantly, by a now five years older Burlyayev—can stand it no longer. He runs and falls to earth, sobbing into Rublev's arms that there was no secret, he had no idea how to make a bell, but he had watched, he could not but try. There is no crack in the bell. It is hoisted successfully. It rings.

There follows, in a paeon of blazing colour replacing the black and white of the film's action, image after image drawn from Rublev's icons. The point is clear. If the boy cannot forbear, but must create, how can Rublev, for very shame, accept frustration? Is this not a topical question, unanswerably answered? No words could be more explicit. Tortured, and torturing, this is yet a masterpiece.

Solaris I do not find so successful. Mainly because, I think, the director lost his way and the action does not bear out what he says he set out to do. *Solaris* is sci-fi, founded on a novel by Lem, a Polish author. Critics (see Philip Strick's review) have pounced on the obvious contrast between the 'spectacular gadgetry' of Kubrick's *2001* (which Tarkovsky had seen) and what Tarkovsky also calls the 21st century, emphasising the 'human interest'. Contrasting it with the original novel, Strick also observes that the director 'has declined nearly all invitations to special effects and emphasises instead the novel's domestic, personal aspects.'

But Tarkovsky himself, in his own apologia, noting that, where Lem began with the entry of the scientists into the space capsule, he himself has begun with the home life of his astronaut, says that this is because what interested him, and what he intended to make the essence of his picture, was the question of the moral and ethical aspect of science. If so, this does not come off.

The surface action, stripped bare, is—as with his first film—simple and hackneyed. A scientist lives with his mother and father and son in a country *datcha* not far from Moscow. He is due for a responsible mission to the planet *Solaris*. Strange happenings have been reported there—he is to investigate and recommend whether the station maintained there needs to be vacated. Before he goes, there is discussion of the phenomena—of some long standing but in which at first no one had believed—a suggestion that figures personal to each observer are materialising from its pulsating surface. Life appears to exist on *Solaris* but in an unfamiliar form, a single continuous cover to the planet, an ocean of living matter with which no one can communicate directly but which can read the minds of the humans and materialise to them figures from their own past experience or inward fantasy. Is this entity malignant? Arrived on the *Solaris* station, the scientist hero, Chris Kelvin, finds his friend and predecessor dead, unable to survive the personal confrontations with which he was assailed, and himself face to face with the simulacrum of his dead wife, Hari, whom years ago he had failed, leading to her suicide. He is also isolated from his two surviving colleagues.

One of these is Sartorius (played, in utterly different character, by the actor of Rublev), a cold-blooded fish, who looks on his own materialised 'guests', in Tarkovsky's words, as a 'purely scientific phenomenon. [They] as it were do not touch him. He refuses to load his psyche with spiritual torments. In this attitude things are lighter for him than for Chris, who recognises in Hari a human being and not only an object for analysis.' The other man, Snaut (played by Kozintsev's Lear), has simply been broken by his materialisations, and become a drunkard.

Kelvin is obviously Tarkovsky's hero. 'I find myself nearer to him,' he writes, and adds: 'A man not too supple, not wanting to adapt to circumstances, he trusts himself, he does not want to change his principles and goes on to the end, even if this seems to others not too sensible. Maybe such people are a bit rigid, but they are strong and human. In a word, I wanted to show by his portrait that the problem of moral firmness, moral purity, penetrates our whole existence, appearing even in those spheres which at first glance are not linked to the moral, for example the penetration of the universe, the study of the objective world, etc.'

It is this that does not come off. On earth, Tarkovsky shows Kelvin as an apostle of the position: 'Moral and not moral, Man practises science. Remember Hiroshima!' And reproved by a colleague who says: 'I am not a partisan of knowledge at any price. Knowledge is only true when it is based on morality. Don't practise non-moral science...' But when on *Solaris*, Kelvin is face to face with his conscience, his past deeds, he is too good a man to practise what he preaches. At first he tries in vain to destroy Hari. In vain! She is warm flesh enough for identity, feeling, sex, even love, but she cannot attain mortality. She can bleed, but she cannot be destroyed, certainly not by him in whose mind she lives. Is he to return to earth, deserting her once again, or abandon mission, parents, child and remain forever with her on this planet? It is this last he swears to her to do, but she knows he cannot.

This is how Tarkovsky sums it up. 'The point is the value of each piece of our behaviour, the significance of each of our acts, even the least noticed. Nothing once completed can be changed. If a man might 'replay' his actions, they would not be worth a groat, this would entail moral devaluation. The irreversibility of human experience is what gives our life, our deeds, their meaning and individuality. . . . It appears that Chris is given a 'second chance', he as it were receives the possibility of experiencing once more the tragedy of separation from her. To repair what has been done once is impossible, but it does not mean that the meeting with the new 'Hari' has not changed our hero. He has once again undergone the experience, but now quite obviously more deeply, he has become cleaner, more humane, discovered a new moral potential.'

We see here, deliberately, the concept of the irreversibility of experience, its role as a constituent of personality, determining action, that stands out pre-eminently in Tarkovsky's work.

Here it unbalances Tarkovsky's declared primary purpose. The issue: should science be moral or amoral cannot be resolved on

this plane of individual human experience. Partly it fails because of a weakness in the director himself—I do not think he understands scientists enough to grasp what makes them tick and so give relevance to his treatment of the problem. As in other fiction films of the scientific life—Soviet or other—the scientists behave not as scientists (they are only wearing hats so labelled), but as such are intellectualised concepts and otherwise might just as well be persons the director knows better, actors for instance or even newspaper reporters. But even more because of his strength—his unsurpassed power of rousing in the spectator an agonised tension and sympathy for the suffering human being (the name-part in the first film, the whole world around in the second film). Here all the arts of his transcendence of naturalism are devoted to an only partially successful effort to explore the background of the failure of Chris and Hari. But from the 'new' Hari herself (Natalie Bondarchuk, daughter of the famous actor) he has drawn so extraordinary a performance of the inhuman-human; feeling, longing, like a human, so near to being but knowing she can never be, becoming, growing closer, but forever debarred—in a word, so fey—that it quite overturns the subject of the picture and makes Chris a clot by comparison.

Indeed all the scientific chi-chi suddenly appears pseudo, the space trappings no more than the conventional 'once upon a time' that begins every fairy-tale. The planet *Solaris* and all the intellectualisation recede like the cheap Egyptology of *She* or *L'Atlantide*. With Hari feeling and poetry carry us back to the age-old legends of djinn-princess brides returning to the never-never lands of birds and serpents, Orkney fishermen whose seal-wives bear them children and go back to the ocean, the peasant left dumb because he cannot find his way back into the green mound. Perhaps this is not what the director meant. It is what we get from a creator who has mistaken his own strength.

I do not think that anyone can 'enjoy' Tarkovsky's films. They are too tense, too agonising, at their best too spellbinding with sympathies. Forty-one years old? Born 1932? Remember, he comes of a generation that, in the years he was the age of the boy in his first feature, was losing in its homeland 20 million dead. But when one has seen any one of his films once, one wants to see it again and yet again; thoughts chase after one another like hares in March.

And in composition they are like Breughels. Not only are they pictures as a whole; take a lens to the parts, the details, they will strike as forcefully. Three images I cannot forget: in *Ivan's Childhood*, an incident that leads nowhere, the embarrassed girl medical attendant, newly come to the front, and the officer attracted to her; in *Rublev*, the exquisite beauty of the landscape as the prince's guards lead off their captive runaway, unconscious across a horse, along the edge of the lake; and, again from *Rublev*, the scene of the rescued woman, crazed and now unconscious, lying amid the heaps of corpses on the floor of the gutted cathedral—a riderless horse enters the building. As it halts its hoof clops on the stone floor. At the sound the woman's head jerks an inch, though she does not open her eyes. She is still a sentient being. ■

MERCHANT-IVORY

John Gillett



'Savages': Anne Francine

Savages has been nicely described by Penelope Gilliatt as 'a glittering sarcastic fable . . . full of withering social comedy and a peculiar, erratic stateliness of style.' Far too idiosyncratic ever to have emerged from a major studio, it was shot entirely at a big house in upstate New York, Edith Wharton country, among the furniture and books and portraits left behind by the owners when they finally closed their unmanageably large mansion. *Savages* builds on the associations of its setting, the house itself seeming like a great, grounded ocean liner of the 1930s. But at the same time, both the film's wayward, elaborately eclectic style, and the circumstances in which it was made, seem to reflect the offbeat enterprise and enthusiasm of its makers, James Ivory and Ismail Merchant. Their company, Merchant-Ivory Productions, is now just on ten years old. They began together with *The Householder* in 1963, went on to make *Shakespeare-Wallah*, *The Guru* and *Bombay Talkie* in India, and have now launched out on their first American-based film. At the same time, they have come up with three new or newish shorts, of which the longest, *Adventures of a Brown Man in Search of Civilisation*, about the Oxford adventures of the Bengali sage Nirad Chaudhuri, had its first airing on BBC television last Easter.

First impressions might suggest that they're an incongruous pair. Ismail Merchant, who was born in Bombay and educated mainly in America, is an outstandingly ebullient example of the producer who really produces. Wherever one meets him—in London, Bombay, Cannes—he gives the impression of being on the way to something important: a distribution deal to confirm here, a cinema booking to be checked there. At Cannes last year, he launched *Savages* with the sort of party Hollywood companies don't give any more, with all the food (Indian, of course) air-freighted from London. James Ivory, his partner, is a thoughtful Californian, a very quiet American, perhaps with temperamental allegiances to James and Fitzgerald (he's anxious to film books by both of them). He talks with the kind of detached, watchful urbanity which has characterised his outsider's view of some of the byways of an India trying to come to terms with Western styles.

Their seemingly contrasting personalities must cohere and play off each other during shooting, perhaps reinforcing an obvious desire to explore areas neglected by more hidebound studio partnerships. Unlike many directors, Ivory likes to have his producer around; and although Ismail Merchant takes no part in the actual filming, he acts rather as a distanced observer, putting himself in the place of the future audience. Merchant attends to all the preparations ('doing everything an assistant would do, and better,' says Ivory), and may suggest additions and alterations to the director if he feels that the day's rushes miss out on any point of emphasis. Both of them seem a bit nomadic, wandering easily between continents; possibly because both of them are really living with their pictures.

The problems of setting up and financing their kind of independent operation would seem formidable. Even technically, because of the currency restrictions which make it so difficult to import new equipment from abroad, film-making in India tends to become more rather than less difficult as the old machinery wears out. Merchant, however, approaches the financial side of the business with an air of rather spectacular unconcern. 'Most people going into films seem frightened of the idea of money, as if it is something that is going to defeat you. I never think of financing before the film is properly set up, otherwise it exhausts all your time and energy. It is something that will come automatically.'

Ivory's description of how their earlier ventures came about suggests the mixture of luck and a special kind of acumen that has sustained their progress. 'We got money for *The Householder* from an Indian businessman, plus some money from my own investments. When we sold it to Columbia, they paid us mainly in rupees. With that money, we made *Shakespeare-Wallah*, which is still the most successful of our films. It keeps bringing in a little cash from TV screenings. Then Fox seemed interested in doing a film in India, and financed *The Guru* from their frozen funds there. After *The*

Guru failed at the box-office we certainly didn't contemplate another film immediately; but thanks to Joseph Saleh, an American businessman, we were able to do *Bombay Talkie* the following year. Saleh himself didn't much like the idea of *Bombay Talkie*, but he seemed to like us and he knew that was what we wanted to do. Now he has backed *Savages*, so we owe him a lot of gratitude.'

After *The Guru*, both Merchant and Ivory were left with mixed feelings about working for major companies. 'Fox were incredibly decent and nice during the shooting,' Ivory says. Once the project had been agreed and set up, Fox left them alone to make the picture, remaining helpfully calm at the other end of a telephone line even at such moments of crisis as when the star, Utpal Dutt, found himself briefly imprisoned on a political charge. 'All Fox did was to request a cast replacement if there was going to be a great delay.'

All the same, the Merchant-Ivory type of picture probably gains from more specialised selling than a big company is likely to give it. Merchant prefers to look for his backing from Wall Street, private investors and merchant bankers, visiting prospective investors armed with a dossier detailing Merchant-Ivory's history and its films' reviews. 'I always tell them there is only one chance in ten of making money, as films are something that either take off or they don't. But if the production is cheap enough, they are bound to see a return from TV sales and 16mm. distribution; and if the product is good enough it will have a long life, like *Shakespeare-Wallah*. This way, you hope to raise quite small amounts from a number of people. But when you realise that out of a hundred films announced these days only about ten are ever finished, it's not surprising that independent financiers are very wary.'

Short films are even riskier, almost to the point of certain loss. ('If you spend between five and ten thousand pounds on a short subject, you might get back between seven and eight thousand at the very best'); but they provide an agreeable interlude between features as well as opportunities for further collaboration with friends and colleagues. The most substantial of their recent trio, *Adventures of a Brown Man*, was commissioned by the BBC, who put up £5,500 for two TV screenings. The other rights remain with Merchant-Ivory; and they themselves put up the finishing money from what they intriguingly refer to as their 'reserve fund'.

Produced by Merchant, written and directed by Ivory, with Anthony Korner as associate producer and photography by Walter Lassally (as on *Savages*), the film is a portrait of Nirad Chaudhuri, the diminutive, 76-year-old Bengali writer, stringent critic of his own country and of the West, and admirer of Kipling. To Chaudhuri, the idea of Westerners going to India for spiritual insight is as ludicrous as the yoga cult or the segregation of the sexes in Hindi society. ('India is not "the biggest democracy in the world". So far as it operated as a government during the lifetime of Nehru, it operated as a dictatorship. The only person who did not know that it was a dictatorship was Nehru himself—all else knew it. He is

now gone, and there is no government in India.') However barbed the comment, it is uttered with disarming sweetness of manner, and in a tone suggesting that its truth must be self-evident to all reasonable people. Chaudhuri, in fact, is one of those compulsive talkers who turn conversation into monologue. Boredom threatens; then, repeatedly, a phrase in his beautifully academic English or another waspish aphorism rivets the attention with its sense and sanity.

Ivory patiently captures all the maddening and beguiling aspects of this forceful personality, watching him being measured for a suit and later dressing up in Regency ruffles for an Oxford dinner party, over which he reigns supreme like some elderly latterday Beau. In some respects, Chaudhuri appears as an extension of several characters in Ivory's (and Ray's) Indian films: a product of the British Raj and immersed in

dreams of England, literature and the European tradition, he has discovered the best and worst of both cultures and is very willing to offer us his conclusions. As he wanders around Oxford, oblivious in his talk to the pressures of traffic and people, he's clearly relishing playing the role of sage in this archetypal setting; and also happy to play tourist, feeding the ducks on the Thames and stretching out an imperious hand for the breadcrumbs carried by his wife in a paper bag. Ivory's cool, unstressed style, and Chaudhuri's apparent unconcern for the camera eye, combine to build up a portrait of a living, thinking human being; and there's a sense of a shared, ironically romantic reaction to Oxford by the American filmmaker and the Indian writer.

The finance for *Helen, Queen of the Nautch Girls* (directed by Anthony Korner, produced by Merchant, written by Ivory)



Above: 'Helen, Queen of the Nautch Girls'. Below: 'Adventures of a Brown Man': the Chaudhuris in Oxford





'Mahatma and the Mad Boy'

and *Mahatma and the Mad Boy* (produced and directed by Merchant, photographed by Subrata Mitra) came from the earnings of Merchant-Ivory Productions in India. Merchant's policy here is not to keep money for the sake of keeping it, preferring to invest it in modestly budgeted shorts to help maintain the company as a continuously going concern. And the switching and mixing of roles involved also pleases Ivory, who enjoys working in cutting-rooms, watching over and helping to shape other people's material.

Helen is mainly a montage of production numbers from a few of the 500 films to which this fabulously popular dancer has contributed since 1957; a heady pot-pourri of the real commercial Indian cinema, that extravagant, rigidly conventionalised world of mythological sagas and novelettish modern dramas where the action always stops for song and dance, and the numbers themselves give full rein to some astonishing fantasies. These numbers, often set in impossibly ritzy looking cabarets, and becoming increasingly suggestive as the years go by, comprise a basic dream world for a vast audience deprived of any other direct sexual stimulus from the censor-bound local screen. For a Western audience, the snazzy camerawork and design, the high-pitched wailings of the playback singers and the often catchy orchestrations (taking in all kinds of pop and rock influences) induce a mood of bemused amazement.

Through it all cavorts Helen herself, looking like India's answer to Barbra Streisand: indefatigably agile, provocatively dressed, taunting a poor convict locked up in a cage, flirting with plumply lecherous leading men as the camera swings with her across a tinselly, flashing stage, and prancing on the giant keyboard in another section of that typewriter number in *Bombay Talkie*. Intriguing, too, to wonder how the plot comes out in the film where, while she's dancing, rats seem to be nibbling away in best Bulldog Drummond tradition at the ropes binding one of her audience to his chair. Seen in a dressing-room interview, Helen herself provides a charmingly matter-of-fact contrast, talking practically about her

career and costumes and the journey from hard-pressed childhood to star status. She's obviously something of a phenomenon, and the film enjoys all her manifestations.

Merchant's own *Mahatma* is his first essay in direction (an earlier American short, *The Creation of Woman*, marked his debut as a producer in 1961), and was shot on Bombay's Juhu Beach, a glistening yet grey setting for a little parable about a poor beach boy and an eminently photogenic monkey, who become involved with a large official meeting pompously dedicated to Gandhian principles but blandly oblivious to the boy's plain need for food and sympathy. Although a trifle soft-centred (and with the boy himself looking too actorish for his role), the film has a distinctive atmospheric flourish, as the camera sweeps across a beach bleakly inhabited by practising gymnasts, a few tired tourists and the droning, white-clad speechmakers, all of whom are watched benignly by a bust of the sage himself, now silenced forever and protected behind a small enclosure of iron railings. Having made its point without too much repetition, and used its setting to the full, the film sensibly knows when to stop.

The three shorts were made quite separately, arising out of different ideas by different people, yet in effect they seem to comment on each other and could well make up a package programme. Perhaps they are also the partners' last look, for a while, at the Indian scene. Both are now looking to the West as their main area of production, an expansion which is also a reflection of film-making realities. 'For one thing,' Merchant says, 'American films have a much greater chance of being shown. India is still a far-out country for most people, with a totally different culture and background, so with any Indian film you start out at a disadvantage.'

Ivory's main concern is the script now being written for them by Lillian Ross (another old friend, first encountered at the time of *The Householder*). It's about a community of rich Chinese who settled in Manhattan from about 1948, and are spectacularly Americanised in their pursuit

of the 'good life', with its attendant riches and power, while retaining all their close-knit family and national identities. 'I haven't seen a word she has written yet. Of course I agreed with her on basic characters and themes, but my policy is then to let the writer go off and finish the script. Afterwards we get together and Ismail and I will make suggestions. But I have great respect for writers like Lillian Ross and Ruth Jhabvala in matters of characterisation. In the case of the Chinese story, I have a good idea of the milieu and the types involved, but the basic story will be Lillian's. This is how I normally work, the exception being *Savages*. On that, we started out without a complete script and it turned out more of an on the set collaboration, with lots of changes. But that was the sort of picture where you could make the characters fit the actors.'

Once the Ross script is finalised, Ismail Merchant will start making his rounds of independent financiers and perhaps some major companies, as well as exploring the possibility of TV collaboration. ('I might also try Chinese investors.') The project is owned entirely by producer, director and writer; and although it will probably not be a big budget picture, they are still faced with all the problems besetting a company without a fixed base or studio. Another plan, to make Turgenev's *Torrents of Spring*, would involve filming in Germany, with perhaps studio facilities and another tie-up with TV. As more distant projects, Ivory is thinking hopefully about Fitzgerald's early novel *The Beautiful and Damned* and about Henry James' *The Bostonians*, a subject perhaps given a fortuitous kind of topicality by Women's Lib. 'I hope the James film won't be one of these dreams that you carry around with you until you are seventy. Then you finally get the money and are too tired to do it.'

Merchant's own plans include another film to be directed in India ('although I don't want to jump into it right away'), and he would like to produce something for Jacques Demy and Satyajit Ray. (Incidentally, it is not generally known that Ray offered to help Ivory reshape *The Householder*, and it is virtually Ray's cut which we now see.) If these plans come to fruition, could it mean that the company will soon be heading in completely new directions, and ceasing to be basically a 'family' concern? 'Making films with friends is marvellous, even though it has sometimes landed us in bad situations—perhaps we haven't always been ruthless enough. Now, when we want to do different things, it might be the right moment to bring in new people to enlarge our operation.'

Whatever the outcome, these two resilient international optimists continue to plan and organise in the firm belief that the best is yet to come. Ivory suggests, half-jokingly, that Merchant is bound some day to have a really big financial success, 'either from me or, I suspect, from someone else.' Anything less would seem a betrayal of destiny. Meanwhile, having just completed editing *Helen* in a Wardour Street cutting-room, and caught the London opening of *Savages* (the Curzon earning high marks for concern about print and sound quality), they are off again. To New York to see how the Chinese story has progressed, and to India for some more unfinished business.

THE HERO



David Robinson

It may have been different for audiences of fifty years ago; but most modern spectators need at least a couple of films to accustom themselves to Fairbanks. The first sight of him can produce a certain bewilderment, that this was the superstar of all times, the world's hero, the one-man American dream. He wasn't very young—already an ageing juvenile of 31 when he went into films, he was 46 by the time of *The Iron Mask*, his last silent. He was not, at first sight, even good-looking. Undressed, in *The Half Breed* or *The Thief of Bagdad*, he has a stupendous physique. In clothes he was inclined to seem stocky and square. His face was square, too; and more and more as time went on he had to hold his head back so that the muscular development of his neck did not give the impression of a double chin. Then there is the disconcerting, unremitting, back-slapping ebullience. An early theatrical employer, William A. Brady, said, 'He was an odd young man, brimming over with energy to such an extent that it fatigued me even to look at him sitting down—and he never sat.' It is not difficult to understand what a rude shock this express train of an actor must have been to D. W. Griffith.

But this is only the initial impression. After the first two or three films the magic seems to renew its potency. It is hard not to respond to the grin, the verve, the ridiculous energy, the whole personality, just as his first audiences did; and you recognise that when writers of the 1920s called him 'a tonic' they

were using no loose figure of speech. Interestingly, his niece and biographer, Letitia Fairbanks—who presumably had her information from Fairbanks' elder brother, her father—alleges that as a child he was so taciturn and solemn that his mother, already, as a Southerner, bothered by his dark

A season of Douglas Fairbanks films, including a print of *The Black Pirate* recently restored by the National Film Archive, was shown at the Academy Cinema in London during January. Left: Fairbanks in *The Thief of Bagdad*.

complexion, thought he was in some way subnormal. A traumatic change came one day when (already an incorrigible climber) he fell off the roof and knocked himself out. When he came round (continues Letitia) he could not stop laughing. 'Obviously it was a moment of hysteria and most children of his age would have cried, but he found emotional release in laughter because the fall was a new and exciting experience. From this moment on, daring adventure was to be an outlet for over-abundant emotions and was to determine all the important moves in his life. Fear was never to affect him . . .

'The emotional release he felt in his laughter was soon followed by the realisation, young though he was, that people preferred smiles to gloom. Henceforth, athletic vigour and smiling good humour became a pattern of living for him . . .'

His son, Douglas Fairbanks Jr., is inclined to discredit the stories of his taciturnity. Still, family circumstances were not entirely propitious to a normal ideal of a happy childhood. His father, H. Charles Ulman, was his mother's third husband. The first, John Fairbanks, had died leaving her with a son, John. Her second marriage to Edward Wilcox ended in divorce. Ulman (born 1833) had seen service as an officer in the Civil War, and later became a distinguished lawyer, a founder and President of the U.S. Law Association. Marriage to a divorcee client was bad for his legal career, however, and he went to Denver to prospect, taking the family with him. The restlessness that was later in his son afflicted him. When Douglas was five, his father abandoned the family. Drink hastened the decline of his fortunes. He appeared infrequently in later years, embarrassed to have to ask for help from his son, by this time an established stage star.

Mrs. Ulman and her three sons (a fourth, by the second marriage, had been mislaid somewhere along the way; he reappeared in later days, along with Douglas' other brothers, as an employee of the Fairbanks studio) resumed the name of Fairbanks. Mrs. Fairbanks' hard work to make a living by taking in boarders financed Douglas' education, which included two years at the Jarvis Military Academy, stage training under Margaret Fealey and, much later, five months at Harvard, where the main attraction seems to have been the gymnasium and sports facilities. In view of all this, and of his undoubted devotion to his mother, it is interesting that in none of his major films does the hero boast a mother, though images of aristocratic and devoted fathers recur: the father whose death must be avenged, to precipitate the drama of *The Black Pirate*; Zorro as the father who crosses the Atlantic to aid his son *Don Q*.

Partly because he himself never held any great illusions about his skills as an actor, it is too easy to write off his stage career on the strength of a leading lady's remark that he

seemed like 'a bad case of St. Vitus' Dance', and the actor-manager Frederick Warde's description of his work in his Shakespearian Company as 'a catch-as-catch-can bout with the Immortal Bard.' Despite interruptions when he tried law, a cattle-boat trip to Europe and a job in his father-in-law's business, Fairbanks always stayed loyal to the stage, from the time of his first role in 1900. Though critics were more inclined to praise his dash and gaiety, and later his athleticism, than his actual talent, his stage career was progressive and successful. By 1908 he was starring (*All for a Girl*), though his first big success was a tour of *A Gentleman from Mississippi*, in a role that seems to have had in it many elements of the ultimate 'Doug' personality. By 1914 he was one of the highest paid juveniles on Broadway.

At all events, he was prominent enough to be among the sixty Broadway luminaries propositioned by Harry Aitken, recruiting stage talent for the Triangle Company. Always ready for something new, and curious about the West, Fairbanks accepted Triangle's offer of \$2,000 a week. The rest is old history: how Griffith recommended him to try the Keystone lot; how Christy Cabanne filmed him in *The Lamb* (the role he had played on stage and which Keaton later played, at Doug's suggestion, in *The Saphead*) with tolerable success and considerable prestige; how it came about that working with John Emerson as director, and the teenage scenarist Anita Loos, Fairbanks discovered his true screen character. Emerson and Loos have traditionally been credited with the 'creation' of the character; but the consistency throughout his films indicates that Fairbanks simply needed their assistance to translate to the screen a spontaneous and personal creation. What was needed from his collaborators all along the line, wrote Alistair Cooke, 'was no rare skill, but a willingness to let Fairbanks' own restlessness set the pace of the shooting and his gymnastics be the true improvisations on a simple scenario.'

The score and a half of simple comedy dramas which Fairbanks made between 1915 and 1920—particularly those made for his own production company, formed at the end of 1916—seem at once a mirror and a dream self-image of Woodrow Wilson's changing America. Not many of them are now available, even if they survive, but those that can be seen show a fairly consistent formula. In the early, establishing scenes, Fairbanks is shown as the victim of some current craze or fad or social preoccupation, with either the hero himself or the people around him fallen under whatever baleful influence it might be. In *His Picture in the Papers* it is the native frenzy for publicity; in *The Habit of Happiness*, social do-gooding (at the end Fairbanks reveals that the true way to help people is to teach them the physical process of laughter); in *American Aristocracy*, the snobbism of the industrial new-rich; in *Down to Earth*, hypochondria; in *When the Clouds Roll By*, both superstition and fake psychology. In *Reaching for the Moon* the hero is a clerk with dreams of an ancient lineage; in *A Modern Musketeer* he yearns for romantic adventure. The clerk of *Wild and Woolly*, the playboy of *The Mollycoddle* and the Eastern clubman of *Knickerbocker Buckaroo* are all fired with a nostalgia (which



'The Masquerader': Fairbanks in a city suit

their creator undoubtedly himself shared) for the manly and straightforward virtues of the old West.

These premises were played with, in comedy incidents and with wisecrack titles in the style of Anita Loos. Again and again the age is brought vividly to life—in the society committees and the doss-houses of *The Habit of Happiness*, the office relationships of *When the Clouds Roll By*, the country club in *American Aristocracy*, with its endless tea dances and the hierarchies in which the wives of mere brewers are shunned and snubbed by ladies connected by marriage to distilleries, while the inventor of the one-hump hatpin is king. (Fairbanks betters himself and proves himself a suitable son-in-law by inventing a two-hump hatpin.)

Somehow or other, the social or character foibles thus posited—along with the girl, and the gang of smugglers, rustlers, spies, filibusters or burglars waiting dutifully around the corner—eventually entangle Fairbanks in perilous adventures from which in the end, extricating himself by rare feats of artifice and athleticism (in the words of another of his titles) *He Comes Up Smiling*. At the end of the film he emerges cleansed and reformed, a better man and a better American as a result of his adventures.

The 'trajectories' which provided the exhilarating denouement and finale of the early films were marvellous combinations of athleticism and ingenuity. Fairbanks had trained his body to a peak of responsiveness. He was a fine horseman, gymnast, acrobat, fencer. His standing jumps—over chairs or on to balconies—seemed to defy gravity. He never admitted any fear. The ingenuity consisted in using the immediate environment of the contemporary, everyday world as a natural gymnasium. Walls were for vaulting; drainpipes for climbing. Any room, said Alistair Cooke, was for Douglas Fairbanks 'a machine for escape'. The thrill is to see this ordinary young man, wearing an ordinary smart city suit, in ordinary everyday surroundings, turn into a superman, solving every problem through great explosions of physical action. At that moment in America's history, immediately before and during the First World War, his celebration of the dual virtues of action and normality, his idealisation of the peppy optimist bouncing with energy and all get-up-and-go, captivated the nation. A mountain peak was named after him. Books of naive inspirational philosophy, ghosted in his name by his secretary Kenneth Davenport, with titles like *Making Life Worth*

'The Thief of Bagdad': '... the indomitable vitality of the unmistakable figure'



While and Laugh and Live, were avidly studied by America's young.

Then, quite suddenly, in 1920 the whole style of his work changed. He was to make only one more of the old-style contemporary comedies, *The Nut* (1921), directed by Ted Reed and written by Kenneth Davenport, neither of whom had worked creatively on his films before. The result was a mess and a flop. Except in his unhappiest sound film, he was never again seen on the screen in modern dress. It was as if, seeing the Wilson era give way before the Harding atmosphere, and the onset of an age in which disillusionment and cynicism—alien notions to Fairbanks—were in vogue, where the old values were crumbling, Fairbanks deliberately turned from reflecting and celebrating his times to offering an antidote for them; turned from films about involvement to escape. Of course it is improbable that there was ever any such conscious deliberation about Fairbanks' schemes. The simple fact for him was probably that *The Mark of Zorro* (1920) was a hit with audiences, while *The Nut* flopped. Costume spectacles were in any case in fashion with the public, who had seen and enjoyed the Lubitsch 'historical' films from Germany; and they gave Fairbanks the opportunity to indulge without restraint his childlike delight in make-believe, which gives the later films not a little of their attraction and force.

The Mark of Zorro is really a transition between the two main periods of his activity. The hero, a kind of Californian Scarlet

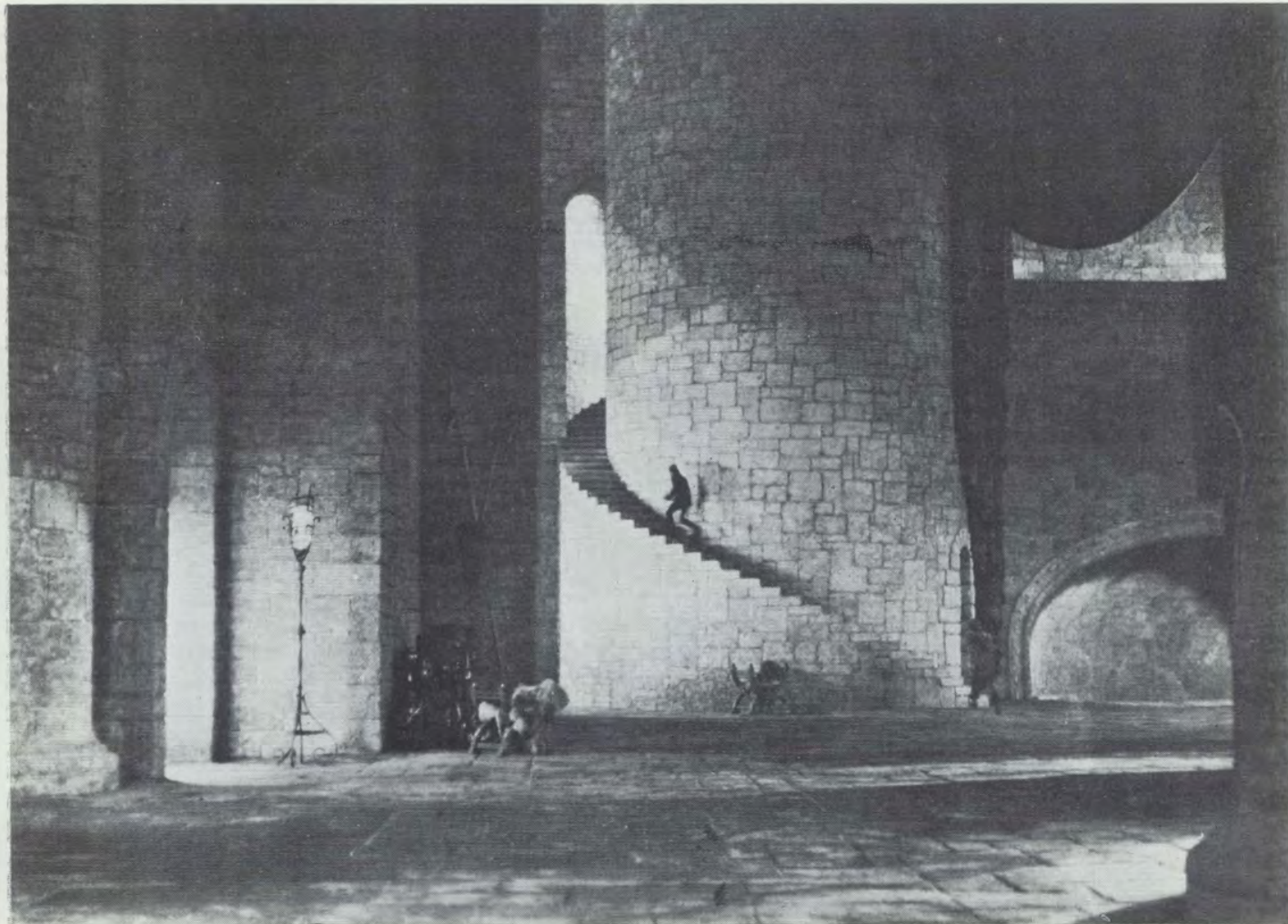
Pimpernel, appears at first as an effete young dandy, daintily dabbing his nose with his handkerchief and doing party tricks. Rather like one of the heroes of the early films, he ultimately reveals his secret other self, the avenger of the poor and oppressed. The character of the avenger recurs through almost all the subsequent films, whether in the guise of d'Artagnan, Robin Hood, Don Q., the Gaucho, or the Black Pirate. Adapted from a novel by Johnston McCulley, *The Curse of Capistrano*, the setting of *Zorro* was unusual—19th-century Spanish California. It was nevertheless a world which still lingered when the Fairbanks family arrived in Hollywood in 1915, to find an old Spanish aristocracy still shunning the vagabonds of the movies. In many respects this is one of the most attractive of all the films, with Fairbanks at once at his most manic and his most graceful, and with scenes of high slapstick comedy as he teases villainous Noah Beery with a deft duelling sword that can at any moment serve him as a javelin or throwing knife.

With *The Three Musketeers* (1921) begins the inflation of production values in which later critics have claimed to see a falling off and betrayal. For Alistair Cooke, 'even in *Robin Hood* the naked line and rhythm of Fairbanks is occasionally shaggy with parades and scenery . . . [The settings] suffocated the old beloved sprite in a mass of decor.' For Alexander Walker, 'the armies of period historians, costume designers, special-effects men and art directors . . . do not support their leader so much as

swamp him.' Contemporary critics, thrilling to all the Art, felt no such doubts; and the audience's loyalty and adoration never wavered. In fact Fairbanks is never, I feel, dwarfed or dominated by the monumental settings he devised. He was simply working on a larger stage, in a larger gymnasium. He was, above all the other characters he ever played, d'Artagnan, fearless, inexhaustible, playful, bold yet gentle. He had already personated d'Artagnan briefly in *A Modern Musketeer*; and would do so again in his last silent film. After *The Three Musketeers* he wore to the end of his life d'Artagnan's moustache.

Already Fairbanks had embarked on his policy of surrounding himself with artists of accomplishment or prestige. The scenario of *The Three Musketeers* was credited to the then fashionable English-author-in-Hollywood, Edward Knoblock, along with Fairbanks himself, Lotta Wood and Kenneth Davenport; and the design of an elaborate recreation of Old Paris was by Edward M. Langley and Willie Hopkins. The director was again, as on *Zorro*, Fred Niblo. *Robin Hood* (1922) carried the same scenario credits, except that this time Fairbanks appeared under his pseudonym of Elton Thomas (his two middle names). This was the first film designed by Wilfred Buckland, who came from Belasco's theatre, working with Langley and Robert Fairbanks, whose engineering skills were often the valuable foundation for the physical marvels which Fairbanks performed with such apparent ease only after meticulous preparation.

The castle in 'Robin Hood': 'What would I do . . . in a great vast thing like that?'



(Tables on which he had to leap, for instance, were cut down precisely to the point where no effort would be visible in the accomplishment.) Fairbanks in fact revealed that he was himself keenly aware of the danger that his character could be dwarfed by the wrong setting.

The castle in *Robin Hood*, 90 feet high and with an interior so large that it could only be lit by sunlight, is thought still to be the largest set ever built in Hollywood. It was constructed during Fairbanks' absence in New York, and on his return he told Dwan (according to Dwan's account, quoted by Kevin Brownlow in *The Parade's Gone By*), 'I can't compete with that. My work is intimate. People know me as an intimate actor. I can't work in a great vast thing like that. What would I do in there?' Dwan showed him, by demonstrating the slide Robert Fairbanks had devised for the scene where Robin Hood, cornered on a balcony 40 feet above ground, leaps over the edge and appears to slide to safety down the fold of an enormous drape. Dwan has also related how a trampoline was concealed to enable Doug/Robin to make his spectacular leap across the moat to cling to the ivy on the castle wall—where, of course, handholds in a net were already prepared.

Fairbanks' action and choreography were simply enlarged to suit the frame provided for it. Still the excitement lay less in the elaborate mechanics of Fairbanks' trajectories than in his ability to conceal them, to make them seem entirely unrehearsed, spontaneous—and easy. Again there is a sustained breezy humour alongside the melodrama of the plot; though today there are likely to be qualms about Robin Hood's men, whose attempts to follow their leader's deer-like bounding and prancing tend to make them look Gay rather than actually Merry. Fairbanks had at all times a winning irreverence for his own romance. At one point King Richard (Wallace Beery) bellows; and the Merry Men, perched on the edge of the same balcony from which Robin has recently made his curtain escape, are all blown backwards over the ledge to vanish from view.

Robin Hood cost well over a million dollars, but brought back profits handsome enough to encourage Fairbanks to make *The Thief of Bagdad* (1924). For Cooke, Fairbanks is now 'a boy grotesquely buried in a library of costume'; and other critics have followed him. If the judgment is applied to the actor himself (apart from taking issue with the description of him as 'a boy': he was already forty-one), his own costumes are revealing enough at points still to raise an eyebrow. In fact *The Thief of Bagdad* now seems one of Fairbanks' best, most accomplished, and certainly most durable pictures. With absolute deliberation he places himself in gigantic settings—the Cave of Fire, for instance, or the battle with the dragon—in which his minuscule figure remains always the focus of activity. No distance can reduce the indomitable vitality of the unmistakable figure.

William Cameron Menzies' settings and Arthur Edeson's luminous photography are a striking monument of period design, Dulac given animation and three dimensions. The fairytale irreality was enhanced by building all the sets on floors of glassy



'The Iron Mask': '... almost like an elegy for Fairbanks' silent cinema'

polished black concrete, and consistently highlighting the lower parts of the structures so that they seem to float insubstantially. The hardest thing is always to integrate real people into a fantastic setting of this kind; but the casting and the dressing of the players—from negro slaves who appear nine feet high, and slaves as fat as elephants, to diminutive Snitch Edwards, a favourite Keaton player, as the Thief's loyal confederate—entirely accomplish the feat of making the setting and its inhabitants one whole. Fairbanks' athleticism had always been marked by unforced grace: here he consciously emphasised it, falling into stylised poses like a dancer, to become part of the design itself. After half a century this roaming, prodigal Arabian Nights' tale still has the power to absorb the spectator in its fairytale world.

For *Zorro* and *The Three Musketeers* Fairbanks had brought himself to championship pitch as a fencer. For *Robin Hood* he mastered the longbow. For *Don Q., Son of Zorro* (1925)—set in Spain, with Fairbanks playing the dual role of the dashing son falsely accused of assassination and the father hastening across the Atlantic to his aid—he became so expert with the bullwhip that he could use it to snatch cigarettes out of the mouths of startled enemies, to rip a marriage contract, to bind villains or scale walls. For *The Gaucho* (1927) he became as deft with the *boladeras*, the weapon of the cowmen of the Argentine Pampas.

Between these two films came *The Black Pirate* (1926), directed by Al Parker, who had played the villain in *American Aristocracy*. It was shot in a two-colour Technicolor process which produced strikingly attractive effects, thanks to the set designs of the Swedish artist Karl Oscar Borg for the galleons on which practically all the action is set. The film is much shorter than the other spectacles, benefiting from a narrative dash which the others—mostly well over two hours in length—sacrifice for leisurely excursions into make-believe. Fairbanks was now forty-three, but had lost none of his agility, and the film contains two of his most

spectacular stunts: the slide down a great mainsail, supported only by the point of a dagger as it shears the sheet; and his rescue from the hold of the ship by soldiers (the plot is complicated) clad in what look like black swimsuits, who bear him up the hatches, passing him from one level to the next so that his body seems to fly upwards like a bullet in a gunbarrel.

In 1929, with sound films already well established, Fairbanks made one more silent film, *The Iron Mask* (with spoken prologue and epilogue; in the 1952 reissue now circulating these have been dubbed by Douglas Fairbanks Jnr.). The story of the saintly heir to France who is imprisoned in a fiendish iron device by his evil twin has an extraordinary pathos—in the treatment of both brothers—quite without precedent in Fairbanks' work. What is more startling is d'Artagnan himself. He can still perform wonders; but he is grey-haired, and at the end of the film he dies—the first Fairbanks character to admit mortality. His spirit rises from his body and strides off into the skies in company with his three brave friends, all of whom have gone before. It seems almost like an elegy for Fairbanks' silent cinema.

Throughout these silent spectacles there is a family likeness about all the characters he played. Most, as we have seen, tend to be aristocratic avengers. All, like the young men of the early films, seek the solution to every problem in physical action, superhuman prowess. Yet Fairbanks remained a conscientious actor as well as a personality and showman. Each hero is characterised, distinctly and often subtly. The noble expansiveness of Robin Hood is quite a different thing from the swashbuckling bravado of d'Artagnan. The languid, jesting Zorro is not at all like his engaging and high-spirited son. And the Gaucho is Fairbanks' most completely untypical character: rough and animal, coarse in his feeding and violent in his treatment of women (until, of course, he meets a true lady, and sees the light when the Blessed Virgin, in the unmistakable form of Mary Pickford, appears to him in the mountain chapel).



'The Iron Mask': d'Artagnan and the musketeers

Fairbanks always said that the hardest thing he ever had to do on the screen was to make love; and he devises some endearing gag solutions to evade the problem. In *The Three Musketeers* he and the lady are everywhere followed by prying eyes (a reflection perhaps of the difficult courtship of Pickford, at a time when both of them were still married to other people) until a friendly washerwoman drops a huge laundry basket over their heads. In *Robin Hood* the hero traces Maid Marian's profile on the castle wall where both their shadows are cast. At the end of *The Black Pirate* he goes into a clinch so prolonged that his loyal henchman Donald Crisp, waiting for a word, drops off to sleep. Generally, though, Fairbanks, the

eternal boy, treats girls like a kid brother, teasing indulgently. In *The Three Musketeers* he goes on all fours to help a girl over a wall, but suddenly flattens just as she steps on him.

It is in the moments of trajectory which climax the spectacles that all the characters fuse into one and the same Doug, bounding along, bent slightly forward so that his shoulders are ahead of the rest of the dynamo body, until he leaps to launch himself into some fresh miracle.

'When a man finds himself sliding downhill he should do everything to reach the bottom in a hurry and pass out of the picture in a hurry,' he said. There was always a dark

'The Private Life of Don Juan': Fairbanks with the director of his last film, Alexander Korda



obverse to the laughter and optimism.

There was no apparent reason why he should not have succeeded in sound films. When in 1929 he appeared with Mary Pickford in *The Taming of the Shrew*, he came off very much better than his wife. He was dashing, funny, had a good voice and spoke his lines with the attack and relish of a trained Shakespearian actor. But a voice, even a good one, was not necessarily a gift to the idols of the silent screen. It may have been that while the vast sets of *Robin Hood* and *The Thief of Bagdad* could not dwarf him, a voice did—merely by removing that magical difference which set apart the silent stars, to whom eyes and face and mind were nature, by bringing him back to human scale. Whatever the reason, nothing seemed to work for him in sound pictures. Edmund Goulding directed him in a musical, *Reaching for the Moon*. Victor Fleming, who had directed two of his best early films, *The Mollycoddle* and *When the Clouds Roll By*, with its remarkable subjective fantasy sequences, helped him with a travelogue, *Around the World in Eighty Minutes with Douglas Fairbanks*. Edward Sutherland made *Mr. Robinson Crusoe*, which has not seen the light of day for thirty years or more.

His last film looks like a cruel allegory of his own decline and fall. *The Private Life of Don Juan* (1934) was directed by Alexander Korda. The plot is slight, but the film is pretty and not nearly as bad as it has been reputed. What makes it so disconcerting is the impossibility of not identifying the role with the actor. Don Juan is at the height of his fame, but feels a little under the weather (I think that this was about the time that Fairbanks himself had his first taste of sickness and underwent minor surgery). Yet while he lays up a while, his alleged exploits continue to delight Seville, for a young upstart is impersonating him. When the impostor is killed by a jealous husband, the real Don Juan sees a heaven-sent opportunity for respite from the responsibilities of his reputation and the pursuits of his life.

Idleness begins to chafe, and he decides to resume his career. It is disaster. One girl demands payment for her favours; another says she likes him because he is so like her father and will he please take a message to her boy friend. A stout matron (Athene Seyler) invites him to marry her and settle down. On his return to Seville, his last lover denies him, saying that Don Juan was bigger and more handsome. The final humiliation comes when he leaps on the stage of the theatre to protest at a libellous play, and is ridiculed by the whole vast audience. The end is a dubiously happy one: forsaking the identity of Don Juan he returns to his wife and a future of domesticity. For Fairbanks, whose marriage with Pickford had broken up irrevocably, whose career, whether he knew it or not, was at an end, and who died in his sleep of a heart attack a week or so after the start of the Second World War, the ending was not so cosy. But like Don Juan, he had bequeathed a legend and the shadow of a hero. ■



The naked face: Guinness awaiting his Fagin make-up. Below: Guinness as Fagin.

SOME NOTES ON FILM ACTING

Lawrence
Shaffer

Children are first able to act when they find themselves capable of pretending something they don't really feel. Actors, however, at least according to current theory, are first capable of 'real' acting when they are able to feel what they're supposed to be only pretending. While acting they must lose the acute consciousness of self that has driven them to act, and they must forget about the desired outcome. Ego drives the career and ego accepts the admiration and awards, but in between there is acting—still ego, but ego transformed into latent content, as in a dream. At any moment in acting that the ego is insufficiently clothed, when it is openly promenading for the viewer, the illusion is broken. In *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*, Glenda Jackson has two such awful 'the emperor is wearing no clothes' moments, one when she mimics a toucan and the other when, back to the camera but so aware of it, she bows to a house she's about to enter. In such cases 'let's pretend' becomes a pathetic plea rather than a *fait accompli*.

It is generally recognised that there are two kinds of acting, personality acting and character acting. Since all actors play characters and exhibit their personalities in the process, the two categories are meant to reflect a felt difference in emphasis and effect rather than an absolute difference. Some

cases are impossible so to classify, and some one like Ralph Richardson is perhaps only thought of as a character actor because of a certain flatness of personality (not of *manner*, which in the unpredictable timing of its expression is among the most histrionic ever seen). Nevertheless, the labels often

point to real differences.

Character acting involves a kind of schizophrenic ventriloquism reminiscent of Redgrave's fearful episode from *Dead of Night*. The public's reaction to character actors is also schizophrenic. At the Academy Award ceremonies, Charles Chaplin, bearing less resemblance than ever to the tramp, almost wept in gratitude at the recognition given him by his inferiors. He was tearful because he, Charles, was being recognised. In his films the tramp never was. The tramp never wept, presumably because he didn't miss it *that* much and because he never could afford the self-indulgence. It took enormous ego to do the tramp, but the tramp had none. Although Charles accepted them, the bravos were really for Charlie. The whole connection between the cherubic little white-haired man and the tramp had to be taken on faith. It was not a matter of Auden's 'private face in the public place'. Both faces were public, as were both places (Charlie's screen world and Charles's Academy Award forum). Charles was worthy of all that adulation only as the tramp, but the tramp was only an image. The mind simply could not identify the two as one. And what did Chaplin feel? Any connection with the tramp? Any ontological connection, that is? (No abstractions, please, about the commonality of human suffering or man's inhumanity to man.) A felt connection must have been as difficult for him to make as for us. Perhaps the tramp was simply something he did once, or made once, like a face.

In character acting at its most obvious, the actor works behind, or through, a plethora of traits clearly associated with a 'role'. He is obviously role-playing. The Jekyll and Hyde quality of character acting is classically illustrated by Alec Guinness in *Oliver Twist*, where, peer and listen as hard as you will, he is nowhere to be found. To complain that the Jekyll and Hyde analogy is exaggerated because Jekyll and Hyde were literally different while Guinness was still Guinness while pretending to be Fagin is almost hairsplitting. Jekyll let himself be overwhelmed by Hyde just as Guinness surrendered himself to Fagin. Perhaps even the need was equally imperative. In both cases we have an 'invasion of the body-snatchers'. The main difference is the vehicle for transformation, a chemical compound versus certain acting techniques.

To say that a character actor 'transforms his identity' seems a miserably loose way of



talking. But other than psychological or acting school jargon, there is no way to fit language more closely to just what Guinness was doing when he 'transformed' himself into Fagin. How can a being apparently change its own nature? How can a being 'pretend' to be what it ordinarily isn't? There is no precedent for conscious identity change in nature. Looking inside Guinness-as-Fagin isn't going to clarify things. The phenomenon is as external as any chameleon, and settling for phenomenological description is an admirably humble acceptance of the mystery, whereas attempted explanation is humbug. Although language falters here, there is no doubt that Fagin is pure character acting, to be distinguished from the contemptible *List of Adrian Messenger*, in which well-known film personalities pulled putty masks off their faces at the end of the movie smugly to reveal their 'true selves'. Yes, they had always wanted to do characterisation in the British tradition, and now supposedly they had.

There are degrees. In *Outcast of the*

around a chicken leg or a bunch of grapes while gloating over his strategically superior position; Lorre's hyperthyroid intensity; Greenstreet fixing his listener's attention while working back in time into a tale of lost gems and crossing trails, the dullness of the present relieved by the possibility that the colourful intrigues of the past have left some loose ends to be resolved; Karloff in a similar struggle against the pedestrian, eager to convey how interesting horror is in an otherwise drab universe; Laughton's petulant egomania; Cobb twisted by the Depression ('Move those dresses, we have a shipment to meet,' snarled around the cigar).

Versatile character actors like Sim and Scofield, who appear in a variety of roles that are yet remarkably constant in tone, resist being placed in either category. They certainly do a number of different characters but rather in the same way. The tone dominates: with Scofield, a fine, nasal intelligence (poignantly warmed and befuddled in *Bartleby*, however); with Sim, a black drawing room comedy delivery, like a

the 'Jimmy Stewart character' means that Stewart is not doing 'personality acting' in the sense intended in this essay.

To get at what this essay means by 'personality acting', I want to keep referring a little while longer to what it is not. To see Scofield making one of his rare film appearances in mere civvies, as he does in *Bartleby*, is an amazing sight. Is Scofield really an ordinary man, and is he now going to be himself? But no, it isn't Scofield there, for once out of uniform and in 'his own' clothes. The actor's personality is yet again being calibrated to the requirements of another character. Scofield 'in the flesh' remains unimaginable. Similarly, to say that Sim is at his peak in *A Christmas Carol* is to appreciate a virtuoso characterisation behind which Sim looks on, paring his fingernails. Although Sim often appears in 'regular clothes' (usually funeral), as in Scofield's case the plain man appearance is difficult to accept at face value because you know Sim is always playing at being someone; the clothes, how-



'The Mask of Dimitrios': Greenstreet talks, Lorre listens

Islands, Trevor Howard is not exactly identical with the shifty, opportunistic Willems, but he's so close that the character's traits seem almost second nature to Howard. It's as if Howard's analyst, if he had one, might discover that Willems embodies for Howard aspects of his personality that Howard could have liked to surrender to, if a socially fostered Puritan ethic hadn't restrained him. In the same film, Richardson masterfully embodies the fatally naive moral rectitude of Captain Lingard. But Lingard is definitely a characterisation of Richardson's, a focal image for the expression of traits that Richardson seems to enjoy expressing. Within the terms of this article, Howard's is more 'personality' acting and Richardson's more character acting.

Character actors might be divided into those who attempt a variety of roles and those who, either through the inflexibility of their own mannerisms (Felix Aylmer, e.g.) or the readiness to be type-cast (Elisha Cook, Jr.), invariably play the same character. The former include Olivier, Guinness, Steiger, Vanessa Redgrave, Welles, Hoffman, Mason, Maggie Smith, Sutherland, Malden, Joanne Woodward. In contrast a strong family resemblance is to be found among characters played by Laughton, Cobb, Karloff, Greenstreet, Lorre, Morley, Tamiroff, Sanders.

The rigidity of these actors is amusing, in a Bergsonian sense, and we smile comfortably when they first appear because we know what to expect: Sanders working his mouth



'Bartleby': Scofield out of uniform

Charles Addams version of P. G. Wodehouse. Regardless of the role, you always hear the same voice, the same mannerisms of phrasing and timing. Yet, though in a way shared by such limited actors as Morley and Sanders, these vocal mannerisms are felt less as the actor's rigidity than as technique, effective no matter what the role.

Other complex cases are those actors who become character actors late in their careers; Bogart and Brando for instance, perhaps because they are then less enchanted with their own persons. Others, like Stewart, Wayne and Fonda, certainly look more like character actors in their later roles, but perhaps that is only because they are ageing. Stewart, Peck, Grant, Lancaster, Douglas, etc. are usually thought of as personality actors, but haven't they always been doing a particular character? Here is that odd category, consisting of actors who early in their careers hit upon a viable screen persona, which then became them in the public eye. Like Sanders, Karloff, and Morley—though far more vibrant and thus leading men—they are playing the character they have become. Semantically, then, the stars compose a third category, but they needn't confuse the issue. They are clearly not doing character acting; yet the fact that there is, for example,



'The French Connection': 'It is all Hackman, simply behaving'

ever conventional, seem to be part of Sim's game.

Personality acting does not, seemingly, involve the effort of character acting. In the finest character acting—Maggie Smith in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Brando in *The Nightcomers*, Vanessa Redgrave in *The Seagull*, Steiger in *On the Waterfront*, Olivier in *The Entertainer*—the audience is still vaguely aware that strings are being pulled, that the actor has concocted special traits for his role. Effort also shows when an actor tends to impose certain facial and vocal mannerisms, as is often the case with Olivier. Such mannerisms are evidence of strain and stress on the acting apparatus. The actor is not 'with it' but straining to 'do it'. Identification and involvement are at an ebb.

To say that personality acting seems effortless means that it seems like sheer behaviour. An obvious example is Gene Hackman in *The French Connection*. Just as Guinness's Fagin represents the epitome of character acting because it is all characterisation—Guinness is invisible—so Hackman's Popeye Doyle is the epitome of personality acting because not the least shred of characterisation is apparent. It is all Hackman, simply behaving. This doesn't mean—the literalist fallacy—that Hackman is 'really like' Doyle. Personality acting is not the absence of acting, as with Fabian, Elvis Presley, and hundreds of Grade B movie actors. Rather, it is acting that can concentrate almost exclusively on expressive behaviour because the role strikes such a responsive chord in the actor's psyche that he

doesn't have to worry about characterising traits and mannerisms. When the role stimulates and provides for the personality actor to put his very best behavioural leg forward, then it is an archetypal role for that actor. Only sharply focused, charismatic personalities can find archetypal roles; none exists for an actor like Trevor Howard because his personality is neither sufficiently magnetic nor concentrated. Archetypal roles do exist, however, for the single-character actors, for example Sanders' drama critic in *All About Eve*, Stewart's idealistic senator in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, Cobb's gangster in *On the Waterfront* and Cooper's sheriff in *High Noon*.

Personality acting, then, occurs when an actor is able to fall right into his role, having only to concentrate on the expressive requirements of the film's fictional situations. When a role achieves this ideally, so that there is no feeling of characterisation whatsoever and the actor is at his expressive best, then it is his archetypal role. Sure, Hackman researched his role in *The French*

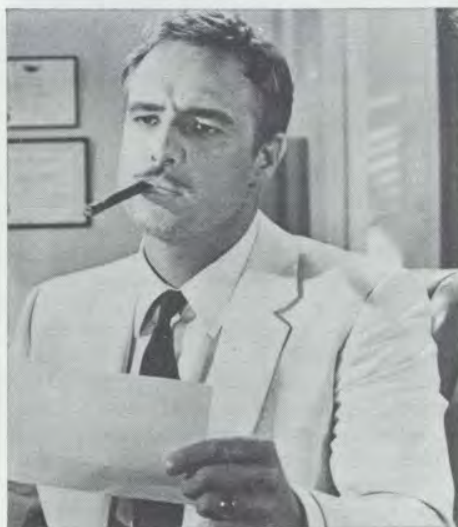
hole. Richardson has a tonal consistency analogous to Sim and Scofield. His Buckingham in *Richard III* and his Dr. Sloper in *The Heiress* are amazingly close, although the latter is more finely honed. Similar in its cold intelligence is his plane designer in *The Sound Barrier*; yet there he seems almost the bare Richardson, with very little characterisation evident. He never loses himself in a character (he did of course as Falstaff, but we are limiting ourselves to his film roles) the way Guinness does. He is always clearly visible, his tone is always the same, yet he is always doing characters. Again, the explanation for all this may be that his technique is strong—a vocal delivery and manner considered by many the most riveting in modern acting—but his personality is weak.

Another complex case is Brando. His early, leading man roles seemed extremely close to the bone, an acting out, perhaps, of an ideal self-image in terms of coolness, graceful movement, thoughtful pauses, etc. Although some might argue, going somewhat against this grain, that Kowalski was

added 'heightening' for expressive purposes). Thus, not 'Be someone else' but 'Be yourself'. Do your lying truthfully. Sometimes unremarkable actors achieve this goal in flashes. Pauline Kael has remarked on the 'rapid changes of expression' of William Eythe in *The Oxbow Incident*, a small miracle of emotional fluency clearly different from those cases of external manipulation where actors 'make a face'. Some actors insist they feel nothing while expressing emotion; they are simply old pros doing a job. Certainly some feelings might be easier to counterfeit—anger, fatigue, boredom, irritation, surprise—than others, such as sorrow, disgust, joy, embarrassment. But even the self-designated old pros must feel something, at least if there is any truth to the James-Lange theory of emotion: if you show anger or fear you will feel anger or fear; if you act startled you will feel startled. Some actors do act(ivate) themselves into the feeling of the role. But otherwise it is difficult to imagine any but the most puppet-like performance being generated by the old pros,



The changing face of Brando. Left to right: 'On the Waterfront', 'The Ugly American', 'The Nightcomers'



Connection, perhaps even fabricated a mannerism or two (though none is visible). But one feels he really didn't have to do any of that sort of thing. 'Touches' were fabricated for Olivier's *Hamlet* (such as a blond wig) and Brando's Terry Malloy (a pugilistic gait), but these were minor, and basically no characterisational seams show in these masterpieces of personality acting.

A personality actor in his archetypal role achieves his apotheosis. Whereas you remember the Guinness character from *Oliver Twist* and the Fonda character from *The Wrong Man*, it is the Scott character you remember from *The Hospital*. Scott is that doctor forever in the mind, just as Hackman and Doyle are forever linked. In addition to these two in those particular films, other clear examples of personality/archetypal role acting are Jane Fonda in *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*, Belmondo in *Breathless*, Bates in *A Kind of Loving*, both Moreau and Werner in *Jules and Jim*, both Finch and Jackson in *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*, Nicholson in *Five Easy Pieces*, Mifune in *Rashomon*, Gould in *Little Murders* and Vanessa Redgrave in *Isadora*, but only as the young Isadora (her rendition of the older, deteriorated Isadora was character acting at its manipulative worst).

Actors and roles are often difficult to pigeon-

his archetypal role, Brando responded more organically to Terry Malloy, who seemed to come with remarkable ease from his depths, while Kowalski now appears to have required more manipulation, more conscious characterisation. In his later career, Brando (unlike, say, Paul Newman) apparently tired of his self-image and turned more towards characterisation, notably in *The Ugly American*, *The Nightcomers*, and *The Godfather*. In the first two, particularly, he achieved a blend of characterisation and personality acting so ambivalent as to defy analysis. There were the characters, different from anything Brando had ever done before—and there with equal certainty was Brando's persona. It was like viewing one slide over another. When confronted with such a complex turn of the identity screw, perhaps language can only shut up, just as it should in certain pathological cases involving multiple identities. Critical jargon in one case is as pointless as psychiatric jargon is in the other. Both are miles from the fact.

The ideal of American acting is personality acting: 'living truthfully under imaginary circumstances' (Sanford Meisner, acting coach). This means less focus on characterisation and more on smiling, getting angry, crying just about the same way the actor would in ordinary circumstances (with

largely because human beings are not expressive mechanisms but expressive organisms. Their signalling devices are stimulated by feeling and not by the demands of a script.

It is hard to conceive of an actor persuasively depicting some aspect of human nature without observing some basic principles of human nature in the process. If Scott insisted that during his long emotional scene with Diana Rigg in *The Hospital* he felt little or nothing and that his behaviour was consciously manipulated, we would be forced to believe him. But Scott would then be for us like one of those science fiction invaders from another planet who simulates a human appearance and emotions but is horribly alien in his true form. Perhaps persuasive expression of feeling can be manipulated—turned on at will—but how? Again, there is simply no basis for it in human nature. The whole problem of 'sincerity' is less acute in personality/archetypal role acting, where the actor's identification with what he is doing solves the credibility problem for him, and thus for us.

'Mimicry', like 'impersonation', 'transformation', 'pretence', 'enactment', is a word that seems to promise a penetration of the mysteries of acting but only describes

some of its appearances, after the fact. Even the most stylised acting is mimicry, in the sense that it is based on something real. But only impersonations, like those of movie stars, are strictly mimetic. Clever mimicry can achieve a convincing portrayal of character traits—as, for example, Marcello Mastroianni's unforgettable twitch in *Divorce Italian Style*. Mastroianni had seen that twitch somewhere and used it. But mimicry is useless when it comes to emotions. It can only produce, or rather reproduce, the appearance of an identity, like the Frankenstein monster or a robot. It can create motion but not emotion. Donald Pleasence gives you the gestural appearance of a derelict or pervert, but behind the thick overlay of mimicry (mimicry in the sense of gestural motion—like sign language—not literal imitation of anything) is an 'actor' activating his motor apparatus, a kind of mad manipulator throwing off a barrage of signals like the wizard of Oz. A Pleasence performance may have its moments of hilarity and sorrow, because the actor is such a brilliant manipulator, but it seems to have no inner identity, no 'soul'.

No current film provides more interesting variations on the kinds of acting we've been talking about than *A Clockwork Orange*. As Alex, McDowell achieves, alternately, triumphs in both stylisation and naturalism. In the early parts, when Alex is running amok, the level of stylisation is worthy of Olivier in *The Entertainer*. It turns out that the character is 'putting it on', false eyelash and all, but it never seems as if the actor is. The incisive, magnificently cruel sneer of the early Alex is as beautifully sculpted as the *David* terribilita, or the grimace of a Japanese demon. Perhaps it would seem a calculation of the actor's if Alex's character weren't affecting the sneer, but even then it would be acceptable because the early Alex is not so much a character as the stylised embodiment of an idea, a 'force' as McDowell himself has described him. And stylisation provides more of a haven for calculation than characterisation.

In the early Alex, there is the carefree expressiveness of personality acting when it has found a home for itself in an archetypal role. The moments of physical and vocal stylisation, for example the whole Restoration comedy feel of Alex's pick-up scene in the record arcade, do not come off as wrenches of McDowell's personality but as formalisations of his 'way'. In the later scenes McDowell gives purely naturalistic expression to that part of his personality, or psyche, that feels repressed, victimised, futile, passive, etc. Again, if McDowell were to tell us that he felt little or nothing during the scene when he returned home to find his place taken by a substitute 'son', that he had simply pressed the required expressional buttons, we would have to accept his word; but we would find such a state of affairs incomprehensible and frightening.

Lesser roles in the film are also of interest. The prison guard is a flawlessly stylised performance, a cartoon figure reminiscent of Lionel Jeffries' sadistic martinet in the Sellers' vehicle *Two-Way Stretch* or of Fearless Fosdick in *Dick Tracy*. Reminiscent of Jeffries but less interesting, because Jeffries used more of his palette in colouring his role. Since Patrick Magee is a particular character, not a force or idea, the



'The Heiress': 'the brilliant ice sculpture of Richardson's Dr. Slop'

kind of ghoulish frenzy that he bravely stretches his acting apparatus towards, and that might have been acceptable as broad personification, does not quite hit the mark. It is funny, it is horrible, and Lord knows what happens in the film justifies his grotesqueness. Yet the lever-pulling reminds one of Pleasence. Despite a penchant for ghoulish roles, Magee is working too hard. Unlike McDowell, as you watch him you're seeing double: actor and role.

The problem with Magee is that certain conventions of horror film acting—allowances for manipulative signalling ordinarily permitted him—become embarrassing here. Needing to dig into himself for more substantive material, he comes up instead with

'The Marat/Sade': Patrick Magee, Glenda Jackson



the rolling eyes and frothy mouth of *Tales from the Crypt*. The grotesquerie doesn't seem organic to Magee. Because, like Pleasence, he has enormous technical resources—lots of strings to pull and a lot of ways of pulling them—he achieves a weird mixture of the funny and the horrible. But he is never emotionally moving. Where McDowell's performance was so unsteriotyped that it reminded you of nothing you had ever seen, Magee's seems full of mimicry, notably of some of Peter Sellers' more frantic moments as Dr. Strangelove. Like Pleasence, the more emotional experience Magee has to account for, the more he manipulates his expressive apparatus to convey it. In his memorable depiction of de Sade, the expressive demands were far less. De Sade was the still eye of the hurricane, in Magee's hands a model of cold composure comparable to the brilliant ice sculpture of Richardson's Dr. Slop in *The Heiress*. With de Sade Magee's considerable qualities of voice, carriage and sheer presence were enough to bring him magnificently through. Further, de Sade clearly had some real meaning for Magee, and the sympathetic vibration showed in the resonance of his acting.

Finally, one of the most fascinating performances in *Clockwork Orange* is that of Aubrey Morris as the probation officer, of which not too much has been said perhaps because it is so hard to describe except in reviewer's terms: nightmarish, funny, surrealistic. The bizarreness of the performance seems just right, albeit defying description. There is no gap to be filled in between actor and role. Either the actor is always like that, which would be dismaying, or he found a main line to the heart of the role, so unobstructed that he reached it without having to resort to clichés. The performance is unique, played with an insane abandon and no cues how to take it. If anything comes close to it, it is Sellers' series of mad, solipsistic flights as Quilty in *Lolita*.

The main enemy of both character and personality acting is self-consciousness. It would be interesting to see the effect on actors of having to perform within a mirrored room. The constant feedback of gesture and expression would probably be paralysing, much as an echo chamber would inhibit speech. If identity is instantly duplicated—faced with its Siamese twin—it will lose itself in wonder at its objectification. Whatever gestures and expressions narcissism might inspire, they would not constitute true acting, only posturing. Thus, the most self-repressive thing an actor can do is to try out gestures and expressions in a mirror. It is like Trigorin's self-confessed hell in *The Seagull*, wherein he is unable to make a move without recording it in his notebook ('It might furnish an idea for a story'). When acting is self-conscious—again, Glenda Jackson's toucan moment in *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*—it becomes petrified in the act; it is deadly. The danger of such objectification (the actor becoming his own object of attention) is more real for character actors, who are always engaged in the objective process of making a persona, than for personality actors, who are engaged in the subjective process of being one.

1972/3

A turning point for European Cinema?

Claude Degand

As we move into 1973, can we say that a turning point has been reached in the economic affairs of the European cinema? One who specialises in analysis has a natural tendency to exaggerate contemporary developments and to describe as a hill what subsequently proves no more than a slight rise in the ground. Yet as our film industries grapple with marketing, financing and exhibiting problems, and as they become increasingly involved in the economic integration of the member states of the EEC, one can discern sufficient progress in 1972 to encourage expectations that in film terms 1973 may well be not only an eventful but an exceptional year.

But before evaluating recent progress, it's worth noting that the activities and initiatives of 1972 took place on different planes or levels rather than on a uniform basis, and that this can result in interference and overlapping and a general lack of direction. Taken as a whole, the work done and the efforts made lack positive coherence. If one surveys the problem, as it were, from a high vantage point, one sees that the operation of the services available in Brussels is itself somewhat difficult to understand: several departments are concerned with the cinema, but they are organised to suit the Brussels administrative machine rather than the natural characteristics of the film industry. From the start the cinema has been studied by two departments, the one responsible for the policy of competition as defined in the Treaty of Rome (which has examined the problem of aids for the cinema), and the department responsible for implementing the programme of freedom of services and the right of establishment. Much more recently another department, that concerned with industrial policy, has appeared on the scene with the object of regrouping the efforts hitherto made in Brussels in a general plan.

There are also the national support schemes, whereby the cinema obtains certain reliefs and benefits from the various national authorities. While these authorities have adopted a cooperative attitude towards the Community, there are only some three or four 'multilateral' conferences each year; and meanwhile national authorities do not remain idle. Whether it is a question of modifications in fiscal policy (as in Italy and Britain) or in aid systems (as in France and Germany), any action taken unilaterally by

Bonn, Paris, Rome, etc. may well be devoid of any 'community' effect and lack any influence, direct or indirect, upon the pattern or content of Europe's future film economy.

Finally, at another level, there are the activities of the professionals, and more particularly of their various international organisations. Here the problem is almost infinitely complicated, owing to the inevitable division of professional strength between the two partners (employers and employees): on the one hand, the ramification of European employers' organisations in the spheres of production, distribution, exhibition and technical industries and, on the other, the fragmentation of the cinematograph trade unions according to their adherence to one of the three international organisations (the CISL and the CMT in Brussels and the FSM in Prague). To complete the picture, one should mention the activities of associated groups such as the bankers specialising in film finance who, through their international organisation (CICREC: Commission Internationale du Crédit Cinématographique), are equally concerned with the way in which the cinema in Europe may be integrated.

The situation now

What then was the position at the end of 1972? The administration in Brussels pursues its task of liberation. But if the Directive on the freedom of distribution of films within the Community, examined long ago by the governmental experts and approved by the European Parliament and the Economic Council of Europe, is in its final stage, the Directive allowing a film to be shot and processed in any studio or laboratory within the Community has only just reached the stage of a proposal which

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Brussels is preparing to submit for multi-lateral discussion. Likewise with the proposed Directive regarding the harmonisation of professional qualifications of certain film technicians. As for the proposed Directive about a European public register, which has been talked about for so long, this would perhaps have been adopted by the end of 1972 had it not been for the arrival during the final discussions of the three new member states. However, the governmental experts of the Nine met in Brussels at the end of January 1973 in order to agree—hopefully in final form—the text of the Directive.

There remains the question of aids, regarding which the latest initiative of the European Commission dates back to September 1970. At that time the national authorities not only resisted the project for harmonisation presented by Brussels, but were careful not to put forward counter-proposals. A little later Bonn did in fact submit a plan for harmonisation in four stages, which was communicated by Brussels to the Governments of the Six; but nothing more has been heard of it. Brussels was compelled to reopen the matter, answering a need felt in some quarters to approach the problem on a less parochial basis; and on November 8th, 1972, the national representatives of the cinema of the Six and of the three new member states were asked to give their views on a novel kind of proposal. This proposal contemplated a broadening of the bilateralism operated to date into a system of multilateral co-production and co-financing, designed to lead in practice to the harmonisation of aids and the promotion of co-distribution of films within the enlarged Community.

Meanwhile, other steps were taken during the latter months of 1972. In October, the Director General of the CNC organised a meeting in Paris where officials responsible for the cinema in the Six and in Britain discussed problems arising as a result of the Common Market of the cinema. The international federation of distributors (FIAD) met in October in Versailles to undertake a study of a system of co-distribution. A month later the exhibitors of UIEC (Union Internationale de l'Exploitation Cinématographique) reaffirmed their willingness to take part in the construction of a European film industry. Film financiers expedited their activities relating to the setting up of a technical organisation to co-ordinate European finance for the cinema. The producers (CICE: Comité de l'Industrie Cinématographique Européenne) met in Paris in December. And the British, French and Italian trade unions associated with FSM dealt with Common Market questions at a December meeting in Rome.

A European Identity

All these initiatives are likely to be followed up, in one way or another, in 1973. What is their precise value; to what exact

end are they tending; what are their common factors, and their respective importance? But to ask these questions in an attempt to find a coherent pattern is much easier than to provide answers, since we do not know where we are going, and we are going there in a haphazard fashion. The European cinema is still seeking an identity of its own. It is admitted—willingly by some and resignedly by others—that it is necessary to move in the direction of integration; but there seems to be little concern as to where this will lead, when it will happen or how it is to be attained.

This is apparent from the talks which have taken place with regard to proposed multi-lateral co-production. The British officials declared that their aid system escaped any right of inspection or intervention on the part of Brussels; while the EEC officials thereupon quoted the decision of June 25th 1970 of the European Court of Justice on the illegality of aids deriving from a parafiscal tax—or, more precisely, a tax designed for the support of a particular product or a particular economic sector. Meanwhile it has been observed elsewhere, particularly in German quarters, that this kind of broadening of the systems of co-production and aid would mainly benefit the American companies operating in Europe and almost make nonsense of the arrangements set up to achieve equality of competition between the film industries of Europe and the film industry of the U.S.A.

During these same talks, it became apparent that discussions in which the new member states take part are likely to be even more difficult than those which were confined to the Six. The officials of Her Majesty's Government (though no longer supported by the Irish and the Danes, who are obviously happy to be freed of British leadership in the Free Trade Area) proved hard and difficult negotiators. Though supposed to be 'joining the ship during the course of the voyage,' the British—and not only at government level, since the representative of the Film Production Association of Great Britain on CICE has adopted the same attitude—seem to have difficulty in appreciating the nature of the ground already covered by the Six during the past decade. One is forced to the conclusion that, for some time at least, the enlargement of the family circle from Six to Nine will only produce extra complications. It's a matter for regret that the Six did not make use of the years when they were on their own to define with greater precision the nature of the objectives they wanted settled.

It can't be denied that the European film position has been improved, now that the methods of operation in production, finance and distribution are being reconsidered and the exhibitors are contemplating the creation of European networks. But it is also plain that progress leads to greater complexity. The problems involved are becoming more precise, more concrete, and statements of intent are no longer adequate. Should the aids, which hitherto have been national only, be made available to the films of other countries; and if so, which ones? Can one formulate criteria which permit the selection of companies which would be entitled to such aids to the exclusion of other companies? But if one thinks in terms

of so-called automatic aids, how is one to reconcile this with the system of selective aids? What then would be the fate of selective aids and quality awards, which are available in certain countries but which others, such as Britain, reject? Then there is also the aid for cinema theatres themselves, and no one yet knows what position this kind of aid will occupy.

The questions could easily be multiplied, not only in respect of the strictly economic aspects of European film affairs but in respect of cultural and also social aspects (professional structures and qualifications, opportunities for employment, reclassification, working conditions); and in respect of the place and purpose of the cinema in an industrial, or even a post-industrial, society disturbed by the periodic shocks of a bounding technology.

Finally, I have a very clear impression that one problem is going to dominate the scene in 1973: namely, the substitution for the previous bilateral arrangements of a system of multilateral co-production of a mainly financial character. Brussels has put forward a project of this kind for discussion among the Community, and the meeting of November 1972 represented a mere prelude to the main task which has to be undertaken this year. The meetings of national officials responsible for the cinema (held in Paris in October 1972 and in Rome in March 1973) included this problem on their agenda. It is no secret that CICE, at least so far as the French and Italian producers are concerned, is pressing for the adoption of a system of the same kind. The question remains: how is the problem to be tackled, and how is the scheme outlined on paper going to be translated into concrete terms?

Guidelines

Let us then try to set out a few ideas which may act as a guide to discussion. At the outset, it should be said that it would seem desirable that the proposals of Brussels-EEC and of Paris-CNC should not be mutually frustrating, or allowed to lead to duplication or loss of time. Subject thereto, the following queries occur to me (though these are by no means comprehensive). Will European financial co-production:

- Result in the ruin of the 'small' production countries by the 'large'?
- Strengthen still further the position of the U.S. film industry in Europe?
- Bring about the pooling of the aids granted by the countries concerned—i.e., automatic aids and selective aids?
- Permit the use of the craftsmanship of technicians and artists who do not belong to the European Community?

If it is admitted that there can be no question of accepting the ruin of the 'small' production countries, then it follows that a national aid can be made available in respect of a co-production only where the country in question is a partner in the production; thus no aid fund can automatically be made available to all productions. It would seem right, however, that the aids to which a particular co-production is entitled should

be pooled; this would no doubt lead to the transferability of aids (which is not really the case in France) and also to the inclusion in the pool of selective aids (which the project of Brussels does not seem to have taken into account). Similarly, would it be right to limit to a strict minimum the creative participation of non-Europeans in the making of a film?

Above all, there is ultimately the problem of protection as against non-European companies, and the problem of the distribution of the financial co-productions in question. On the first point, it must be observed that Article 58 of the Treaty of Rome recognises any company established in a member state as having the nationality of that state. This means that any such company is in some way European in relation to the law of the Community. The advantages to companies which are in fact only subsidiaries of powerful foreign groups are obvious: they are 'European' and their products will benefit from the 'internal market' which brings together—or will soon bring together—six or nine national markets. In the case of the cinema, it is well known that this system will play into the hands of the U.S. companies and that this applies particularly in the area of distribution. Accordingly, the problem arises of liberalising film trade within the Six, and now the Nine, and of reinforcing the arrangements (particularly the financial arrangements) for Community rather than national support for such trade, while at the same time avoiding handing over an extra means of domination to the U.S. companies established in the Community. In that event, the gain in economic efficiency would be lost in the sacrifice of independence.

But the Treaty of Rome will not be altered just for the sake of the 'seventh art'. There can be no question of eliminating American companies, whose presence in Europe certainly has positive values. However, the true position cannot be disguised. Thus I have tried to demonstrate in my book (*Le Cinéma... cette Industrie*, page 229) that in many cases national authorities formally attach a national label to films which are in fact financed by the Americans and distributed worldwide by the Americans; one could argue endlessly over the true nationality of such films. Everything depends on the extent and degree of economic integration in relation to domination; and this period of transition in European cinema, from a partitioned economy to the economy of a large market, could greatly contribute to reversing the balance of power in an unfavourable way.

It is conceivable to have arrangements for the control of product and control of companies with a view to including the one but not the other in a system which by its rules would be a privileged system—and, in terms of those to whom it would be available, a preferential one. In my book (pages 237–238), I have suggested an enquiry into criteria which would permit the definition of a 'genuinely European' company, to which would be reserved the benefits of a system of preferential financing established on a Community basis. The subject deserves investigation, and reference might be made to the experience of the Trudeau Government, which has tried to stem U.S. influence

in the whole mass media industry in Canada.

In any event, and whatever the results of such an enquiry, it is clear that effective control of commercial companies is never an easy matter. That is why it must be asked where the control can be most effectively exercised and the task of selection carried out. My own answer is unhesitating: in the sphere of distribution. In the first place, there is the numerical argument: there are, and always will be, fewer distribution companies than film production companies, and it is easier to decide 100 cases than several hundred. In the second place, I am still of the opinion that, in the economic and financial complexities of the cinema, the key is held by the distributor; and this idea seems to have gained credence. The Brussels proposal concerning multilateral financial co-production contemplates the distribution of such films throughout the EEC; the European distributors are thinking in terms of creating networks; and the film bankers are studying arrangements for the support of distribution.

In these circumstances, the following scheme is proposed:

- (a) European financial co-production—the first stage towards the pooling of artistic, technical and financial assets—should be allied with a system of European distribution—European on the basis of commercial activity, and as completely European as possible on the basis of the nationality of its management and its capital structure.
- (b) The activities of these European distribution companies would deserve financial support to help them stand up to the competition of the powerful 'foreign' companies—foreign in fact if not in law—and develop to the maximum their ability to promote films rather than their ability to operate as producers' bankers.

There remain to be defined the general methods of support to be furnished to European distributors directly—and to production companies indirectly; the specialised film bankers are engaged in studying all these problems. And the various patterns of aid include financial co-production, which is likely to make rapid progress and lead to substantial readjustments in the present system. Why not combine these two developments? It seems to me that it would be interesting to create, on a European basis, a system of 'guaranteed bank loans'. It would be excellent if the film bankers of the various countries were to co-ordinate their activities and move towards some readjustment of their financial arrangements; but it would not be enough. A step forward would have been taken if these financial organisations were able to place at the disposal of distributors (and through them at the disposal of producers) an increased volume of credit in the form of advances repayable out of receipts and registered in the various public film registers set up under Directive No. V; and if they were able to make such advances on advantageous terms as a result of part of the aid funds of member states being made available to these organisations as a guarantee fund. This type of partially guaranteed loan works in the following way: the bank receives X from the state concerned (which deducts this from its overall aid fund),

amounting to a total fund of F ; the bank then makes available to distributors credits equivalent to $5 \times F$ (which is the position in France) or only $4 \times F$ or even $3 \times F$ (which the managing director of the NFFC would hope might be the position in Britain). Thus, in the event of failure it is the guarantee fund—the public and not the bank—which would cover the first loss. The steps taken at the beginning of 1973 by the specialised film bankers of France and Italy to set up a European film financing organisation, and by the distributors to establish the first European distribution network, give solid encouragement to progress in this direction.

It seems that along these lines there lie opportunities for reconciling a number of more or less conflicting interests:

- (a) Continuing aid for the cinema without the need for structural reforms (by developing credits and repayable advances).
- (b) Refusing to play into the hands of the Americans without becoming anti-American.
- (c) Fulfilling Community obligations, profiting by the liberalising methods adopted and benefiting the cinema through devices adapted to suit it, and at the same time taking into account certain anxieties expressed in Germany in connection with the renewal of the aid law.

Such a system would not cover all the machinery of finance or all the methods of aid. There remains, for instance, the subject of qualitative and selective aids; a subject which member states should ultimately be able to keep under their own control on the ground of the cultural policies which they intend to practise.

Conclusions

How is one to conclude? It seems to me that alongside all the discussion about the type of machinery which may be created, the most important objective should be to build the separate elements into a coherent theory and to achieve cooperation in terms of people and organisations. The time has come when the job has to be done; when a choice has to be made between the old attitudes of 'every man for himself' and 'divide to rule' and a new attitude of constructive cooperation, sustained by a dogged determination to win through. Unfortunately, this will mean sacrifices in some quarters and in the short term, whereas it is the whole industry and the long term which should be the paramount considerations. In fact, the painful problem of choice cannot be avoided. Equally, one cannot want progress and reform at one moment or in a certain area and preach the status quo at another moment or in other areas.

But it seems that things have changed, and that there are stirrings of cooperation and enquiry in pursuit of a common objective. As a determined advocate of the United States of Europe, I am delighted about these developments—for Europe in general and for the cinema in particular. My hope is that 1973 will corroborate this optimism. ■

Film REVIEWS

Cries and Whispers

The first voices to be heard in *Cries and Whispers* (Gala) are those of an army of clocks, muttering and chiming in a litany of comment at the uncontrollable passage of time. Surmounted by baroque helmets of golden cherubs, their faces stare at us in impassive accusation, as though confirming that to encase life in a mantelpiece ornament is one of mankind's more ludicrous ways of externalising his mortality. There is a close-up of the second-hand, chopping down like a scythe, and then, in an instant of heart failure, a clock has stopped. It is as if a miraculous suspension of nature lets us slip through into an uncertain period beyond, where a woman sleeps, clumsy and inadvertent, in a chair, while another struggles through a crisis of agony on her sickbed, rises feebly, and sets the clock to rights again. She'll last a little longer—long enough for us to explore whether her existence has been worth the struggle. 'It's early Monday morning,' writes Agnes in her diary, a Bronte sister striving to come to terms with the intolerable, 'and I'm in pain.'

It's a superb opening, rich, elaborate, familiar. The images are fresh, yet *Wild Strawberries* (for example), with its eager coffin and uncommunicative timepieces, began in much the same way fifteen years ago. Bergman has no right to expect us to join his game again, but one responds gratefully to the pattern as to an immaculate, freshly set-up chessboard, the symbols losing nothing in potency for their reappearance. Time always seems to have been running out for Bergman's characters, deported as they are from a clouded past to a baleful future through the insubstantial landscape of the present. The journey allows them a few questions, some inarticulate gestures of love and hatred, and nothing more. They endure a lifetime of sleepless mornings, and an entire inquisition of doubts and pains.

For Agnes in *Cries and Whispers* the pain is that of terminal cancer; she is dying among the blood-red furnishings of the family home, attended by her two sisters Karin and Maria, and by the devoted, motherly servant Anna. Despite its theatrical resonances, the situation assumes the usual Bergman complexity by the simplest of means—the flashback which we can believe or not as we please. Since the ambiguities of *Persona* and *Hour of the Wolf*, Bergman's sudden interpolations have not been the most precise means of following the narrative, but *Cries and Whispers* appears to provide genuine, if startling, recollections, heralded and concluded by floods of crimson across the screen.

Agnes (Harriet Andersson), who has never married, has passed the years in memory of the mother who largely ignored her except for a single sorrowful gaze. The others have suffered more eventfully. Maria (Liv Ullmann) has had an affair with the local doctor, leading her despairing husband to attempt suicide, while Karin (Ingrid Thulin) is imprisoned in marriage with a man she loathes so much that on one occasion she mutilated herself to avoid his clutches in the bedroom. These two operatic sequences—Maria's husband staggering about with a paper-knife in his chest, and Karin

hacking between her legs with a piece of glass and smearing the blood across her mouth—are punctuated by the hideous spasms of Agnes as she dies. Take it all seriously? Well, no. But the melodrama has prepared the way for the film's most extraordinary sequence, in which Anna the maid dreams, imagines, or remembers (it's not too important which) the resurrection of Agnes and the cries of her shrouded body for the embraces of her sisters. Their disgust and terror outweigh their affection for Agnes, and it is left to Anna to provide for any physical comforts that the living corpse may need.

Bergman's final images are tranquil, a symphony of white dresses and late summer colours; it is a day recorded by Agnes' diary as her happiest, spent in the company of her devoted sisters. Like Björnstrand's speech at the end of *Through a Glass Darkly*, it needs to be treated with suspicion, not least for the sentimentality with which Bergman infuses it. The joyful Agnes, whose feet never were too firmly on the ground, depended for her perfect day on the façade presented by the impulsive Maria and the unresponsive Karin, whose incompatibility (however much exaggerated by Anna's fantasy) has been illustrated by their parting conversation. Betrayal is more in their nature than love. So Agnes may be able to conquer pain with love, but it leaves her no better off than the rest of them—even the maid is a mother substitute and treats Agnes as a replacement for the child she lost. Yet Bergman's clocks keep ticking; since the duration of our lives is so brief, he seems to say, why not settle for an illusion or two? It's an unusually mellow

conclusion, and he'll need to reach it several times in a row before we can believe he means it.

In all other respects, *Cries and Whispers* is a well-thumbed catalogue of disillusionments. As in *Hour of the Wolf*, Bergman has assembled characters from all stages of his previous work—the scornful lover from *Sawdust and Tinsel*, the tortured cleric from *Winter Light*, the rapacious sensualist and the brooding intellectual from *The Silence*, the below-stairs realist from *Smiles of a Summer Night*. All the old conclusions are there: marriage is a tissue of lies, men are weak, brutal and repulsive, sex is degrading, faith is inaccessible unless you have it already, in which case it's inexplicable. At times, *Cries and Whispers* looks like self-plagiarism, particularly when Anders Ek, voice atremble, tells us straight to camera that Agnes had a stronger faith than his, or when Erland Josephson and Liv Ullmann take each other's wrinkles to task in close-up. Occasionally there's even a narrator, chipping in abruptly to tide us over a bit of explanation the easy way, his contributions too arbitrary to appear much more than second thoughts. 'It's the same old film every time,' Bergman said while shooting it, 'the same actors, the same scenes, the same problems. The only thing that makes it different is that we're older...'

Nevertheless, the other differences are there. For a start, *Cries and Whispers* is a stunning Bergman experiment in the uses of red and white, its rooms upholstered with membranous scarlet, its occupants like brilliantly costumed ghosts. The elemental colours give a magnificent force to the anguish of the characters; if nothing else, they *look* too good to be disregarded. And striking in on them from the delicious, neglected world outside, like brief illuminations of their dark lives, come geometric slabs of sunlight, warming a face here, a smile there, until the breakthrough comes at last with the final open-air exuberance. Bergman and Nykvist have been achieving miracles with light for years, but *Cries and Whispers* is unquestionably their greatest collaboration.

Two other continuing dialogues in the film support Bergman's familiar contest between darkness and light: first, a whole subplot is revealed through the language of hands, caressing, clutching, tearing, breaking, at their most eloquent during the otherwise silent

'*Cries and Whispers*': Ingrid Thulin, Kari Sylwan, Liv Ullmann



caresses between Karin and Maria, their most terrifying when the talons of Agnes rasp slowly down the edge of her bed. Second, there are the cries and whispers themselves, inarticulate murmurs at the fringes of the long night, somehow combining gossip with guilt, fear and anger, as each of the four women explores her own conscience. With the end title, with Agnes' apparent victory, they at last die away as if they were no more than the ill-formed vocabulary of darkness. But like the clocks, it's unimaginable that they have gone for good.

PHILIP STRICK

The Adversary

Too much, probably, has been made of the increasingly direct political involvement in Satyajit Ray's work indicated by *The Adversary* (Contemporary). It is but a stone's throw, after all, from Siddhartha's running battle with the Establishment back to the young couple's fight for the right to work for an honest wage in *Mahanagar*, or for that matter to Ashok's refusal to sell out to the lures of big business in *Kanchenjunga*. The difference, as Ray himself has pointed out, is one of political climate: 'You feel it every moment of the day in Calcutta: not just the bombs and the explosions, but meeting people and walking the streets with the posters on the walls.'

In a city where misery is not only extreme but subject to extremes—so that Siddhartha, sitting down by the riverbank to enjoy a quiet cigarette, turns his head from the reproachful gaze of a beggar only to encounter a band of ecstatic American hippies ('Oh, what a beautiful place... this is where the magic is')—some sort of revolt is inevitable. But although Siddhartha's fist is metaphorically clenched from the moment of no return when a selection board slaps a label on him ('Are you a Communist?') in reply to his assertion that the most significant event of the last decade is Vietnam and its revelation of a people's courage, Ray does not follow Glauber Rocha or Godard with a mathematical analysis of the cause and effect of revolution; his equation, as always, is founded not on figures but on faces.

Reading Che Guevara, aloof from personal concerns, single-minded in his devotion to the cause on hand, Siddhartha's younger brother Tunu is the *sine qua non* of revolutionary cinema: the communicator who has totally erased the past in order to devote himself to a present whose justification will be the creation of a new, undefined future. To Ray, as to Siddhartha, he is clearly an enigma. 'Do you remember that bird?' Siddhartha asks at one point. 'Bird?' says Tunu vaguely. And Siddhartha's 'No, you wouldn't' sadly acknowledges the fact that there are people to whom the mysterious magic of memory means nothing at all; the magic, for instance, of that moment earlier in the film when Siddhartha's bitter remonstrations with his sister over her attempts to act the emancipated woman are forgotten in a sudden shared delight as they become children again to remember the strange and tantalisingly unfamiliar song of a bird.

Like the old zamindar in *Jalsaghar*, Siddhartha cannot live without his past, and in a sense his dilemma is a looking-glass version of the one posed in the earlier film, since he cannot retreat into the past he refuses to abandon. 'The Gods to each ascribe a differing lot/Some enter at the portal, some do not,' was Ford Madox Ford's mocking comment on the growing pains which attend changing times in *Parade's End* (curious how one always returns to the English novel in writing about Ray); and where the zamindar, one of the elect by birth and fortune, has his portal within which to retreat, Siddhartha is a poor medical student and must face the realities of the outside world.

There, surrounded by moral irreconcilables,



'The Adversary': Debraj Roy, Dhritiman Chatterjee

he emerges as that paradox so acutely analysed by Ford Madox Ford in the character of Christopher Tietjens, the old-fashioned Tory so compleat that he is *therefore* the purest of socialists. An inborn and sternly cultivated sense of honour ensures that Siddhartha emerges from his pilgrim's progress through contemporary Calcutta—the ubiquitous suffering, the cracked cups in cafés, the selection boards designed to safeguard the system, the medical student pilfering from Red Cross collection boxes, the sister being tempted into a life of sin—with an instinctive, unqualified cry in support of his brother's programme. 'The only way,' says Siddhartha, 'is a machine-gun to clean it all up.' Yet those same inborn qualities mean that his revolutionary impulses are always blocked by his desire to preserve the status quo of humanity. Charging blindly in to join an angry mob bent on revenge against the glossy, chauffeur-driven limousine which has just knocked down a little girl, Siddhartha stops dead in his tracks. Facing him is not the abstract mask of oppression, but another frightened, helpless child sobbing in the back seat.

It is this moment of truth, coupled with the humiliating debacle when he runs away after being introduced by a friend to an obliging prostitute, that tumbles Siddhartha into a nightmare of doubt (perfectly judged flashes in which he imagines himself as victim of a revolutionary guillotine, his brother facing a firing-squad, his sister sucked into a lurid career as a model), made all the more unbearable by another memory dredged up as a buffer but instantly turned against him. As children, he remembers, it was of course Tunu the cold-blooded revolutionary who used to watch fascinated while chickens were decapitated for the family dinner. 'What of it,' retorts Tunu, 'you're the one who liked chicken, not me.'

Characteristically, Ray restores Siddhartha's belief in his own values with an oblique affirmation of the continuity of both time and humanity. Walking disconsolately home after a blustering visit to his sister's boss in a manifestly uncalled for attempt to protect her good name, he is hailed from the shadows of a doorway by one of those deliciously, shyly provocative Ray heroines, whose diffident request for help in mending a broken fuse heralds the birth of a tender but quietly soaring love affair. Then, when he finally reaches home to take up the cudgels with his sister, she takes his hand and leads him out into the moonlit yard. 'I'm taking dancing lessons,' she explains; and in a moment of weird enchantment which echoes

the memory of the strange bird singing, she dances for him while he translates her in his mind to the alien setting of a cocktail party. 'How you've changed,' he says simply. 'So has everyone,' she replies.

The calm reconciliation of this moment—his childhood love now secure in its new context—is echoed in the superb final sequence. Having contrived to remain true to himself by making the quixotic gesture of protest which ensures that he will lose his chance of a foot in the door of success, Siddhartha is banished to a remote village and a dead-end job as a pharmaceutical salesman. In a sordid little room he settles down to write a love letter. 'I don't expect to be happy here,' he writes, 'but my worries are nothing to yours, and they'll vanish when I get your letter.' And outside, somewhere amid the rice-fields and the ox-carts of his childhood, the mysterious bird sings again, a bridge across time and space.

TOM MILNE

Savages

'Anything is allowed. It's just a matter of how much one can get away with, I suppose,' says one of the guests at a house party during an improvised game of charades. It's a line which James Ivory and his scriptwriters must have relished. *Savages* (Hemdale) is an elaborate charade, a take it or leave it entertainment, with no meaning or any meaning according to taste or inclination. Certainly not a film of its time, but also a film entirely of itself, which maybe accounts for its appeal.

It began with a house, a rambling, neo-Georgian mansion of the kind to which each generation adds a wing or two, which Ivory stumbled on by accident in upstate New York. Deserted now and crumbling slightly, the house inside was preserved intact, with furniture and bric-à-brac and heirlooms left as they were, preserved in time and amber when the last of the Vanderlips moved out. The place came to mind during one of those 'wouldn't it be fun if' conversations in which Beechwood House was to be the setting for no less a story than the rise and fall of civilisation—in a day, of course. And from this dilettantish notion came a script, by George Swift Trow and Michael O'Donoghue, about just that.

Like Ivory, the film's savages find the house by chance, or if you like by fate. The harbinger of their twenty-four hour destiny arrives out of



'Just Before Nightfall': Stéphane Audran, Michel Bouquet

the unknown, a perfect sphere, actually a croquet ball whose apparently unprojected flight interrupts a ritual sacrifice and leads them, foolishly curious, out of the forest and into the house, via a bemused encounter with a luxury limousine, circa 1930. Once inside the house, civilisation's progress is magically swift. The Mud People, and their captive girl from the Seed Masher tribe, very soon have their clay masks off and are donning their costumes for the forthcoming charade. Again the clothes are vaguely 1930; later there are indications that it may also be 1913 or thereabouts. It's part of the fun of this kind of allegory to create a very specific framework for a less than specific centre, and the film has some offhand fun casually switching dates.

From time to time, hints are dropped, but seldom noisily. Around this point, for instance, only a few shots separate both an iris and a split screen, which may be an indication from the cameraman (Walter Lassally, whose photography is immaculately toned throughout) that the time loop may have landed the savages between times. Or again this technical flourish may be just one of the film's decorative devices, like the arbitrarily numbered art-deco titles or the passages from Heine and Schiller, solemnly delivered in the original as though masquerading as scholarly anthropological commentary. These whimsical affectations decorate the film, and whether one finds them irritating or engaging will determine one's reaction to *Savages* as a whole. We first see the tribe in black and white, which changes to sepia when they stumble on the house and begin to explore its artefacts, halfway between darkness and light. Colour comes with a burst, in a shot of a girl in a red-spangled dress perched on a swing; both the timing and the implication are probably arbitrary, possibly dependent on nothing more than that the shot looks good, and certainly it doesn't matter.

Clues are there for the taking. The clay-caked savages look like actors with masks and mud on; later, in the house, the tribe's warrior type starts playing with an enormous model train set, and one notices that though by this time he has donned a suit appropriate to a modern magnate, he is still bare-footed. These little conceits look to have been improvised during the shooting, for the fun of it; the film's centrepiece, in which civilisation slithers from

sophistication to decadence within the course of a dinner party and its aftermath, looks more worked on. Such curious episodes as one tribe member's burning of bees under glass are now marked for a place in the scheme of decline and fall. The savages dress for dinner, exchange gossip and innuendo about their placings at table, and suddenly they have names, identities, a past. There is more than a hint that the tribal archetypes are preserved within this civilised veneer: the man of action is now Otto Nurder, capitalist; the ancient and leader is Sir Harry, pensioned diplomat; the dinner party hostess was the tribal matriarch, and so on. During dinner, there's a passing reference to the Mud People and their disintegration with the arrival of the railroad; but the more pleasurable distraction here is the quality of the dialogue, which scintillates with barbed malice.

Here it's the very arbitrariness of the dialogue, and yet its precision of timing and nuance, which engages. The dinner party conversation is a scriptwriter's dream, a once only opportunity to plunder a personal treasure trove of useless information and pointless anecdotes picked up from anthologies and encyclopaedias. 'Do you know, Lady Cora, the meaning of the term bric-à-brac?' someone ventures as a conversational gambit straight from an etiquette primer. Someone else bounces an Ashanti proverb (as maddeningly inconsequential as all proverbs) across the wine-glasses, and the response is a story about an artist's ruination at the hands of a damning critic, delicately intoned by a highly strung girl who then reveals it as a verbatim extract from an obscure dictionary (credited to the scriptwriters). A phrase from Homer appears as a neon sign hovering over the house, and the hostess reels off a string of incantatory nonsense ('ink eradicator... weevils in the tea') while caressing some fruit. Civilised entertainment, in fact; and only momentarily interrupted by the unmannerly reappearance of the croquet ball, which rolls off its shrine through the dining room on its way back to the forest.

Such intimations of the fall, like the sudden crackling of a radio reporting the death throes of an ocean liner, punctuate this central section without distracting too much from its incidental pleasures, like the splendid pastiche of a Twenties song, or the sudden, hypnotic shot from outside the house as the lights blink on

and off. They are bizarre details, like the fact that two of the guests appear to be transvestites, and it's left to the audience to decide whether they can be explained—or need to be. The descent of man, when it finally begins, is a literal descent, via some Oriental mysteries in a downstairs room to the onset of decadence in the cellar when the maid (the Seed Masher girl) brings in a platter of carcass. This progress, as Ivory admits, is *The Exterminating Angel* in reverse, a source previously acknowledged in the scene when one of the guests leaves the table for an assignation with the maid. There is no Buñuel savagery here, and none is intended. The mood is jocular, and Ivory has already had a joke at the expense of critics with comments about the musician among the guests and his neglect of serious pursuits in favour of frivolity; but he doesn't allow himself to be drawn on this, and won't admit that there is anything to be read into this artist's withdrawal to the ivory tower of an attic, or his apparent hesitation when the rest of the tribe pursue the croquet balls back to the forest.

This final section, like some of the beginning, lacks the sharpness at the centre, but on the whole this is Ivory's most confident film, more controlled than any of his Indian films, including *Shakespeare-Wallah*. A uniformly excellent cast (mainly from American theatre), among whom it is invidious to single out Thayer David as the magnate, Salome Jens as a splendidly haughty woman in disgrace, and Kathleen Widdoes as the song and dance woman/man, helps enormously to keep the pace steady during some of the stickier passages. On the evidence of *Savages*, it's less easy to pin down Ivory's style than it is to note his eclecticism. In particular, he seems fascinated by the impingement of one culture on another, from the British in India through the savages here to his next project, which is to be about the Chinese in New York. His films may not be to everyone's fancy, but there's nothing quite like them.

DAVID WILSON

Just Before Nightfall

The bourgeoisie survives on guilty secrets and its own discreet charm; the masochist craves public humiliation as the ultimate affirmation, and consummation, of his own self-hatred. Chabrol's *Juste avant la Nuit* (Columbia-Warner) is the drama of a middle-class masochist, robbed by the society of which he is outwardly a symbol of both his crime and, to a lesser extent, his punishment. It is also the drama of an unfaithful husband, and as such something of a companion piece to *La Femme Infidèle*.

Once again, Michel Bouquet's Charles enjoys an 'ideal' marriage with Stéphane Audran's Hélène in the insulated affluence of the Versailles green belt; once again, he murders the outsider who threatens their domestic equilibrium, and in the process betrays the violence of a passionate nature normally concealed by well-oiled social banalities. But where the faithful husband murdered his wife's lover in an excess of conjugal tenderness which revived her love for him, the crime of the adulterous Charles is open to more cynical interpretations. He strangles his depraved mistress in an attempt to deny his own depravity, yet in the act experiences a pleasure which he cannot attain with his superficially gentle and all-forgiving wife. And though Charles eventually moves Hélène to silent complicity in his crime, even forcing her to become his executioner, Chabrol here seems less concerned with the transference of guilt than with the considerably more repressive transference of innocence: the extremes to which the bourgeoisie will go to whitewash the cracks in its clean façade.

Charles' twofold guilt—his perversion and

his crime—is established in the pre-credits sequence, with the camera tilting down a cramped and airless Paris street before zooming slowly in on a single window in a shot which recalls the illicit assignation at the opening of *Psycho*. In the room beyond, a fully dressed Michel Bouquet sits primly in the foreground, while behind him a woman, naked except for a holy medal at her throat, postures obscenely on a big, blue-sheeted bed (always a sign of sensuality in Chabrol's films) and orders, 'Viens jouer, ou je me venge.' The game which follows—a bizarre, sado-masochistic ritual in which the clearly dominant woman plays at being a naughty schoolgirl and demands punishment from 'monsieur le rapiste'—culminates in the strangling.

After the crime and the credits, Charles Masson repairs to a dimly lit bar where, despite his dark glasses, he is recognised by a surprised neighbour, François, who offers him a lift home. They stop for another drink in their friendly neighbourhood café—all bonhomie and sparkling primrose plastic—and the ugly new autoroute which has brought them out of Paris emerges as a bridge between two artificially separated worlds: the city of darkness, commerce and sordid sexuality; and the clean, green suburb, a kind of monument to man's moral pretensions. Here the film's ironies multiply. François is revealed not only as Charles' best friend and the husband of the murdered Laura, but also as the architect of Charles' house. Deprecating about his own marriage, he idealises that of the Massons and has built their house in his image of them: open-plan and made predominantly of glass, it is not a place for secrets. Nor, with its neat twin beds, is it a place for sensual discoveries. (Significantly, this is the one Chabrol film in which the characters eat little, and badly.) For Charles, the house—like his paisley shirts, his black au pair girl, his refusal to own a car—is a token of nonconformity, built on his naive theory that 'un peu d'avant-garde autour de soi évite la sclérose.' But as he gradually discovers, it is in no sense a structure which can accommodate the enormous eccentricity of his act.

The sight of his wife and children, his idolising mother's remarks about Laura's patent immorality, the rituals of Christmas and family life, heighten Charles' sense of his own unworthiness and stimulate in him a desire to be judged by his peers. But just as he, to the rage of his camp business partner, will refuse to judge the 'faithful' accountant who absconds with the office payroll, so they politely accept his act as a momentary aberration and refuse to modify their opinion of him. Craving rejection, Charles proceeds miserably from one confession to the next, only to be offered absolution rather than punishment. Hélène receives the news of his liaison with a 'mon pauvre chéri, comme tu as dû souffrir'; François learns that his best friend murdered his wife, observes sympathetically that no one is guilty of what happens in a nightmare, and that he'll drop by tomorrow as usual. In vain does Charles protest that 'je ne peux pas supporter de ne pas être jugé.' Neither Hélène nor François will be drawn into the game of crime and punishment which only Laura understood.

Hélène will, of course, eventually make the decisive play, but only after her uncomprehending and antiseptic sympathy has subtly provided the spectator with some justification for Charles' at first sight monstrous act. Yet what makes the film's ending so unusually chilling is that Hélène herself, unlike her namesake in *Le Boucher*, recognises no connection between her own 'virtue' and her partner's vice, indeed persistently refuses to acknowledge that the vice exists. Even when she kills Charles, it is not to satisfy his lust for punishment but rather, by preventing him from going to the police, to keep his darker reality from leaving any permanent stain on her ideal home. The final sequence, with its layers of duplicity, offers

a bleak view of the foundations on which such homes are built. Protesting that she understands and admires Charles' desire to do what is right, Hélène cold-bloodedly administers an overdose of laudanum; and he, secretly aware of what she's done but believing that she has done it for him, at last falls asleep in childlike contentment, clasping the hand of his 'model' wife as they lie side by side in their separate beds.

JAN DAWSON

The Salamander

A salamander, Alain Tanner tells us during his film, is an attractive but venomous lizard which can go through fire and emerge unscathed. By fire Tanner doesn't mean passion or catastrophe; rather he has in mind a monotony of work, of people, of conversation and landscape (all of them, apparently, particularly Swiss) which is as menacing as any natural phenomenon.

By class, geography and sex, Rosemonde, the salamander of the title, is born to a world of oppressive tedium. Seventh in a rural family of eleven children who live in a bare valley doomed to six months of winter, she is at twelve packed off to a war-obsessed petit bourgeois uncle in Geneva who uses her as a housekeeper. Even holidays with the uncle are unendurable; but Rosemonde, with the police on her tail, manages to escape to the Côte d'Azur. One day as the uncle is obsessively cleaning his gun, he is wounded in the shoulder. He claims that Rosemonde has shot him; she insists the gun went off accidentally. The case is dropped, and Rosemonde escapes to a superficially independent life of tedious jobs.

So much for case history. At which point enter Pierre and Paul—and a dichotomy which may owe something to Tanner's co-writer, John Berger. They will collaborate on a television script based on Rosemonde's life. Pierre (Jean-Luc Bideau), the journalist, armed with a battery of tape recorders and cameras, will arrive at the facts via an exhaustive investigation of Rosemonde and her life; Paul (Jacques Denis), the writer, will discover the facts in his imagination. Extrapolating from Rosemonde's name (a Saint's Day, therefore a younger child in a large working-class family...), Paul swiftly pieces together a story which, we later discover, closely resembles the real one. Pierre stubbornly begins a lugubrious inquest into

Rosemonde's past, unleashing a baleful litany of abused authority from a landlady ('Shocking disorder!'), an employer ('Broke all records for lateness!'), and the uncle ('She's a bad lot!'). When Pierre finally meets Rosemonde, his own journalist's authority topples and he finds himself acceding ironically to her requests to feed her, advise her, make love to her, spend a frozen weekend in a dreary hotel near her family. Paul, initially with great reluctance and later with great commitment, finds himself on the same route. Despite its accuracy, he is forced to abandon his script: 'Now I feel I no longer know anything about her. A journalist repeats what he's just learned. Whereas I'm trying to make sense of what I already know.' Finally both men abandon their scripts.

In this Pirandellian situation of two (or four, with Tanner and Berger) authors in search of a character, Tanner ensures that the audience will be no farther ahead on the trail. The opening slow-motion shot of the old man falling wounded while cleaning his gun, with Rosemonde's frightened, disembodied face in a corner of the frame, visually reproduces the *fait divers* on which Pierre and Paul will base their story, but gives nothing away on the question of Rosemonde's innocence. We, like Pierre and Paul, must wait until Rosemonde feels like confessing. To Pierre's requests for her life story, Rosemonde replies by turning up the volume on a juke-box or making up a fairytale. The truth is not discoverable by direct enquiry; it can only emerge obliquely.

In the same way, Tanner's camera rarely confronts its characters head on. Instead it often locates itself on their backs, peers over their shoulders, or wanders away as they are speaking. Music will set up a scene and then suddenly disappear, startling us into an uncomfortable awareness that we are in a cinema watching a movie. An ironically omniscient commentary often previews what a character will do next, or mockingly describes what we have already seen.

The tone and style of the film—expectations constantly thwarted or ironically fulfilled, scenes apparently (though not in fact) improvised, off-hand visual gags (the condom-like sausage skins which Rosemonde fills in her first production line job, the startled reactions of the customers in her next job at a shoe shop when she absent-mindedly massages their legs)—recalls the free-wheeling exercises of the early *nouvelle vague*. Specifically, Truffaut's shadow lurks throughout

'The Salamander': François Simon, Bulle Ogier



the film; Paul and Pierre, the dreamer and the realist, complementary friends and amicable rivals for one woman, might well be stepsons of Jules and Jim. But Rosemonde (played with deadly accuracy by Bulle Ogier), for all her dominance, capriciousness and darting flashes of gaiety or sadness, is no Catherine. Although she is very aware of her sexuality, it is more likely to play a part in her victimisation by society than to help her to rise above it. Disillusioned and a confirmed drifter at 23, Rosemonde resembles Barbara Loden's Wanda; but unlike Loden, Tanner translates his character's lack of ties as freedom. We last see Rosemonde after she has quit her shoe shop job, her face a joyous and confident contrast to the grey, empty faces of the monotonous crowds.

Tanner reputedly made *The Salamander* (Connoisseur) on a budget of £26,000, on 16mm blown up to 35mm, with a small crew and in a minimum number of days. It is actually his second feature, following *Charles Mort ou Vif* which he made in 1968. But it's worth recalling that Tanner made his debut in England sixteen years ago, when with Claude Goretta he made *Nice Time*, an open-eyed look at Piccadilly Circus which was shown in one of the Free Cinema programmes. After working as an editor at the BBC, he returned to Switzerland when his work permit ran out, since when he has been making documentaries for Swiss television. His television experience shows to advantage in *The Salamander*, for which he received a partial grant from the Swiss government. That he could produce this accomplished and original film with such slender resources is a lesson from which British directors might have something to learn.

VICTORIA RADIN

My Childhood and Skinflicker

The year 1945, and the end of the war in a Scottish mining village. A bonfire burns in celebration; next morning the ashes smoulder. Two shots record the event, just as earlier the presence of war is indicated by the rumble of distant bombs, an Anderson shelter, a solitary Spitfire droning in the sky. It's an economy born of necessity, since *My Childhood* (Connoisseur) was shot for £4,500 in three weeks; but it's also an imaginative economy characteristic of a film whose spare, even spartan style is part of its essence.

The childhood of the title is Bill Douglas' own, a patchwork of incidents culled from memory and telescoped into a few months of skeletal narrative, scenes from the life of eight-year-old Jamie, who lives with his older brother Tommy and his grandmother in a grim back-to-back. Exposition is minimal. Jamie scrabbles for coal on a slag heap, watches as the other village children run to meet their fathers at the pit head. Later, and no less obliquely, we learn the reason for his isolation, as some dark hint about his parentage is suggested in a brief close-up of a double-oval photograph of two sisters, one of whom may be his mother—and there is even more doubt about his father. He may be the man who stops him in the street to press sixpence in his hand, but Jamie is too enveloped in the awesome business of being a child to linger over his paternity. It's the moment that matters, not the rationale; and in almost every scene Douglas isolates the event, the object, the particular emotion. When Jamie and his grandmother visit his mother in a mental hospital, what strikes him is not the withered vegetable in bed who happens to be the mother he doesn't know, but the apple which the nurse, all starched accent and institutional bustle, snatches from him, and his mother's cowed withdrawal as she pulls the sheet over her head. Later, harassed himself, he repeats the gesture.

Dialogue is rare, decor as bleak as the time and place. Douglas doesn't look back from the



'My Childhood': Hughie Restorick as Tommy

safe distance of nostalgia—he simply and dispassionately registers the event. So the images linger, frozen like family album photographs, at once familiar and unique. Jamie pours hot water into a cup and gently presses his grandmother's hands round it; his cat eats Tommy's canary, and Tommy unceremoniously kills the cat; grandmother dies in her chair—'We'd better go for your dad,' says Tommy coolly. Counterpointing these bleak moments is the tangible warmth of Jamie's friendship with a German prisoner-of-war, one loner seeking out another; and running through the film a marvellous rendering of the mystery and innocence of childhood—the secret lair, the exhilaration of standing on a bridge wallowing in the smoke from a passing train, the rare complicity when Jamie and his grandmother cheat over a bus fare. It's an adult's evocation of childhood, but distilled through the mind of a child, an experience of childhood as emotionally turbulent but morally neutral. For Jamie, as for every child, emotion is indivisible from the event which provokes it, and Douglas takes almost every scene at its own level, for its own authentic value.

So much so that when he does occasionally interpose himself—in an overhead shot of Tommy's father scurrying from the house, in the rather facile irony of 'All Things Bright and Beautiful' echoing across the slag heaps—it's like a silence jarringly broken. But this is a rare discord, soon forgotten in a film whose keynote is its precise simplicity. It's no easy achievement to sustain this kind of charged austerity, but there is no sense of strain and no indication of the effort it must have taken to get a largely nonprofessional cast to be as unself-conscious as they are here. Already the comparisons are being trotted out: Donskoi, Dovzhenko, the neo-realists. Comparisons which for *My Childhood* are scarcely appropriate and wholly unnecessary. Bill Douglas' film can stand by itself.

Both *My Childhood* and *Skinflicker* were made under the auspices of the BFI Production Board, but that is all they have in common. *My Childhood* is the first part of an autobiographical trilogy; Tony Bicat's *Skinflicker* (Connoisseur) is a one-off piece, and an impersonal experiment. Staccato titles spell out 'This is a Government training film' as an official voice denies it to unauthorised persons. Forewarned, we sit up in expectation, already swallowing the first of several carrots. A bit of

funny business, and the film begins. We are to watch the kidnapping, torture and murder of a government minister, courtesy of a blue movie-maker hired by three terrorists (teacher, nurse, psychopath) to film the act. The trio, talking to camera, abusing the cameraman, offer themselves as 'soldiers fighting for a better world'; though the manifesto, we're nudgingly reminded, is not spontaneous but read parrot-fashion from a script. Preliminaries over, the stocking-masked cameraman turns to address the camera—it's not clear who is at this moment filming him, and the first of several doubts about the internal logic of this exercise is sown.

The kidnapping is filmed as a home movie, in 8 mm. and colour, a nice device for making capital out of technical deficiency. Back at headquarters, the kidnappers berate their victim, grind his dentures in the dust, spit their motives in his face; hanging from a beam, he stumbles out the Establishment's apology. The police arrive, and the terrorists turn their guns on

'Skinflicker': Henry Woolf



themselves. 'The obscene illusion we live by,' one of them has said, and the point is taken—several times. There's an interesting idea somewhere in Howard Brenton's script, but it's drowned in the film's muddled waters. It's clear, for instance, that the use of a blue filmmaker parodies the notion of audience (silent majority?) as voyeurs of the pornography of violence. But the idea needs a framework, a structure to enable us to differentiate the film's farrago of styles and methods. Something more, certainly, than the implication that the kidnappers' violence is motivated by frustration (the girl talks of the pitiful crones she ministers to in a geriatric ward), which is a misapprehension of the dialectic of planned political violence as muddled as woolly liberal objections to the film on the ground that it appears to advocate violence.

The confusion is only compounded by references to actual events ('We are all angry now,' says one of the kidnappers), which undermine the film's repeated reminders of illusion ('That's not blood, it's ketchup'). If you're going to use a Brechtian device, it's worth recalling that one of Brecht's most effective distancing devices was something as simple as a chalk line. *My Childhood* scores with its simplicity—direct, unsophisticated in the best sense, a film which was made for and deserves more than an art house audience. *Skinflicker* is an intellectual conceit, and a hollow one.

DAVID WILSON

Travels with my Aunt

Back in the mid-Fifties Graham Greene was the first British critic to recognise the importance of Nabokov's *Lolita* on the occasion of its Paris publication by the Olympia Press. For thus championing the corrupt and pornographic he was attacked by the *Sunday Express* columnist John Gordon and he responded by launching the satirical 'John Gordon Society' to suppress subversive literature. Some fourteen years later Greene combined the two aspects of that long-forgotten episode in *Travels with my Aunt*, a picaresque quest in the Nabokov manner that was more deliberately calculated to *épater les bourgeois* than anything he had previously written, at least in his fiction.

The journeys made in England, Europe and Latin America by the prissy, ageing bank clerk Henry Pulling and his outrageous 74-year-old Aunt Augusta (who's in fact his mother) constitute a light-hearted allegorical odyssey through Greeneland, where every incident has some elaborate parallel in the author's work and life. The ultimate object of the search is to find Augusta's long lost lover, the nonagenarian con man and war criminal Signor Visconti, a Machiavellian, Manichean figure who personifies attractive, irrepressible evil. Visconti is of course the eponymous hero of Marjorie Bowen's *The Viper of Milan*, the novel which—as he tells us in the essay 'The Lost Childhood'—influenced the 14-year-old Greene to choose writing as a vocation, and also shaped his world view, that 'human nature is not black and white but black and grey.'

Oddly enough for a writer so widely celebrated for the cinematic quality of his work, Greene's novels have never been brought to the screen with anything approaching the distinction and individuality that they have on the page. And there isn't too much to choose between his own adaptations and those by others. Carol Reed's *The Third Man*, made from Greene's original screenplay, remains the only instance in which his style and vision have been realised more than intermittently. There is no easy explanation for this, and during the 1930s, before he even worked in the cinema, Greene was able to re-create movies in his *Spectator* film column (*Pépé le Moko* is one example among many) as if they were his own work.

As I've suggested, *Travels with my Aunt* is beneath its active and comic surface perhaps the most intransigently literary of all his novels: like *Lolita* it possesses a whole dimension, or infrastructure, that resists both dramatisation and mediation to a mass public. Nevertheless, again like *Lolita*, the novel's meaning and the relationships between its principal characters are capable of being transposed to a visual medium—provided that the adaptor has understood them. Regrettably, Jay Presson Allen and Hugh Wheeler do not appear to have grasped the scope, form or morality of Greene's novel.

The 'Travels' have been telescoped into a single journey to Paris, Istanbul and Spain that involves Augusta in raising ransom money to release Visconti from the Moroccan kidnappers who are supposedly holding him. That this is a confidence trick of Visconti's own devising would be obvious at a very early stage to anyone coming to the film with no knowledge of the book, though some painful time elapsed before I appreciated that this ludicrous (or treacherous) denouement lay up the screenwriters' diaphanous sleeve. The characters are similarly scaled down. Pulling (played by the admirable Alec McCowen) is just a bourgeois square, unbuttoning under the influence of a little continental travel—not much different from a character in *Carry On Abroad* letting his hair down on a package holiday. He's never in any sense transformed or genuinely corrupted. Far from showing him having abandoned his old moral code and given himself over to a new, exhilaratingly amoral existence, the end of the movie freezes on a spinning coin that will determine his acceptance or rejection of Augusta's world. Once again this over-worked, inconclusive concluding device has been used in a bogus, disreputable fashion.

Augusta Bertram (Maggie Smith) becomes a slightly shocking eccentric elderly relation, a sort of Our Mame in Istanbul, who indulges in plushly staged flashbacks—vulgarily with a voracious French lover, dreamily with Visconti whom she meets in a pre-Great War Gare de Lyon restaurant and a modish Twenties brothel in Italy. As for Visconti himself, he is presented as a smooth Lothario (somewhat inappropriately charmless, anxious and sweaty as played by Robert Stephens) without a trace of genuine evil.

George Cukor presumably became associated with the film when it was being prepared as a

vehicle for Katharine Hepburn and stayed with it when she dropped out and Maggie Smith took over. It's a pity that after the disastrous misinterpretation of Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* which he attempted to salvage four years ago, he should have been saddled with an equally bad adaptation of a novel that also maybe lies outside his sphere of interest. Clearly what most commanded his attentions were the glossy interiors and misty flashbacks which are the more obviously irrelevant aspects of the picture. Only on a very superficial level could one recognise any community of interest between Cukor and Greene, and it would be unwise to search for it. If for Greene life is an extension of hell, to Cukor it is an aspect of show business. Yet one would be doing an injustice to the director, and the considerable range of his work, if one were to say that the complexities and ambiguities of *Travels with my Aunt* (MGM-EMI) had been reduced to a slightly risqué 'Women's Picture' because that is Cukor's forte and the only kind of film he is capable of making.

PHILIP FRENCH

Ulzana's Raid

There is a beguiling persistence of vision about the way *Ulzana's Raid* begins, as if it were another chapter in the Aldrich chronicle of dirty missions from World War II. A small detachment of soldiers, their sympathies and leadership variously divided, is despatched on unpleasant duty by a military officialdom anxious to cover its own tracks by frequently quoting the rulebook. The military context, with its channelled struggles for power and an arbitrary authority enforcing a clear-cut distinction between friend and foe, Them and Us, seems to be as amenable to Aldrich as to Fuller; and *Ulzana's Raid* (Fox-Rank) works over various crises of authority with a vigour and economy that leave *The Dirty Dozen* and *Too Late the Hero* standing flatfooted.

Ulzana, the 'incorrigible savage' who leads a small party of Apache braves in a break-out from an Arizona reservation, is much discussed but little seen. For the pursuing soldiers, led by an inexperienced lieutenant (Bruce Davison) and a seasoned scout (Burt Lancaster), Ulzana is the enemy 'you ain't going to see much of'...

'Ulzana's Raid': Burt Lancaster





'Minnie and Moskowitz': Seymour Cassel, Val Avery, Gena Rowlands

except for the dead things'; and the film closes with hallucinatory tightness around that perspective, mapping out the tactics of pursuit in a kind of delirious close order drill that keeps the soldiers ineffectually distanced from a foe who remains totally, inexplicably other. At least, almost so; the mechanics of the chase reveal that Ulzana (Joaquin Martinez) is as much of a military tactician as any white soldier, in fact one whose ruthlessness, or desperate practicality, gives him that infuriating edge. Operating as mocking shadows of their pursuers, the Indians adopt useful items of army hardware: binoculars, odds and ends of uniform, the bugle with which they lure one homesteader out to a grisly death.

Denied any overt sympathy, Ulzana's plight is defined with bitter intensity through the many parallels and paradoxes that are set up as his role switches through fiendish embodiment of the Enemy to cruel parody of the colonising white men. The limitations of his raid are clearly set: with scarcely any chance of permanent freedom, his brief reign of terror is a false escape, a desperate attempt to break the monotonous spell of life on the reservation. His excursion looks rather similar to Peckinpah's getaway, or to Jeremiah Johnson's deluded search for 'something different'. In the way that it calls up impossible hopes and nightmarish fears, Ulzana's raid is as much a flight into interior landscapes; and just as the McCoy's only escape infinite replays of the same absurd action through a dream escape to Mexico, so the hope is expressed at the beginning of *Ulzana's Raid* that the Apache may just 'trail south' across the border, as if he would then cease to be a problem as surely as if he had dropped off the edge of the world.

With no final goal, and no clear intention except, as the scout insists, to burn, rape and torture, Ulzana keeps his raid going from moment to moment only on certain stringent conditions, the most important being that his braves are always properly supplied with horses. In search of the materials that will keep his power alive, he comes at one point on the homestead of Rukeyser, another 'alien', who has determined not to surrender his farm and possessions to the Apache and who is driven to barricade himself inside his house in a fit of insane defiance, before being tricked into delivering himself to a lingering death.

The other sustaining factor in Ulzana's des-

perate sortie is his son. It is the realisation of the boy's death that finally breaks the Apache's will; and the sense of connection given by the relationship is taken up in shifting father-son roles throughout the film, especially as they are distorted and institutionalised by the forms of army life. Lieutenant DeBuin passes from his real father, who believes that 'it is possible to be both a Christian and a soldier,' to Major Cartwright, 'a creature of reaction,' to the pragmatic scout Mackintosh, who is on hand to temper both DeBuin's idealism as to the Apaches' intentions, and his vengeful wrath at the evidence of their atrocities. DeBuin himself plays Christian father to the Indian scout Ke-Ni-Tay, rather like Crusoe to Friday.

Mackintosh, as the constant repository of any available practical sense, seems always to stand a little outside the main action; and Burt Lancaster perhaps weighs somewhat too heavily as chorus in the generally fine ensemble playing. Similarly his sympathetic relationship with Ke-Ni-Tay is rather glib, although it serves its purpose as the only fraternal partnership in a disrupted world (from the broken pans across the landscape at the beginning to Aldrich's liking for sudden, jarring low angles) where paternal authority can so easily become unbalanced and exploitative.

RICHARD COMBS

Minnie and Moskowitz

In a uniquely speechless scene of domestic relaxation—children, balloons, party fare, at a timeless remove from the fierce to and fro of emotion that has gone before—the conclusion of *Minnie and Moskowitz* (Fox-Rank) recalls the opening of *Husbands*, with its brief snapshot identification of a comfortable world, soon disrupted by troubled reflections. The two sequences lightly parody each other, while either film might be picking up where the other leaves off. Cassavetes' get-away-from-it-all husbands take a 48-hour vacation from responsibility to agonise over the authenticity of their emotional commitments; Minnie and her suitor negotiate similar stumbling blocks while discovering marriage as the only available alternative to frustrating impasse. The switch of direction—from insiders looking for reassurance that there is still a way out, to outsiders scouting

the painful ways in—characterises much of the wild alternation, the battering of emotion caught in closed situations, within each of Cassavetes' films.

Minnie and Moskowitz is a particularly frenetic switchback ride; a continual rebounding from Moskowitz' complaint (among many): 'It's mainly just being alone that irritates me,' to Minnie's multiple anxieties about involvement: 'Somebody light bores me, somebody heavy depresses me.' The journey turns up some rewarding perceptions, but is ultimately and unexpectedly disappointing, with the film attempting to combine wholehearted indulgence of its characters with some sly, philosophic definition, extracting from rambling duologues pointed turns of phrase placed in audible quotes (the director tempted to turn advocate and sum up for the jury), and allowing much obscure contrivance to loom behind moments that pretend to be unaffectedly true.

What has been most remarked and admired in Cassavetes' method is his incorporation of quasi-underground improvisation with conventional forms of story-telling. In a superficial way, *Minnie and Moskowitz* makes do with a minimum of structure, its story only existing very loosely to bring together the unlikely of lovers. Minnie Moore (Gena Rowlands) works in a Los Angeles museum, is coming to the end of a stormy affair with a married man, and is rather reluctantly steered into a date with a businessman, Zelmo Swift (Val Avery). He has a line in aggressive confession which seems on the point of turning to physical violence when Minnie is saved by Seymour Moskowitz (Seymour Cassel), a 30-year-old car park attendant who has recently abandoned a similar job and a solitary existence in New York. Rescue does not bring relief: Seymour's simple manner goes with an explosive way of broaching a relationship, and he is quickly provoked by Minnie's habit of fighting shy of emotional demands. Their subsequent affair does not so much deflate the ideal of romantic cinema (their own movie tastes run to Bogie and the ubiquitous *Casablanca*, myth-making once or twice deplored during the film) as intertwine with it to some satirical and conscious effect.

Going further, in the spirit of ironic footnoting which infects the dialogue with such an awkward air, Cassavetes undercuts some of the romantic ground of his own film-making past. Locking the central pair into a kind of two-person, peripatetic encounter group, *Minnie and Moskowitz* seems far removed from the belief, implicit in the restless explorations of the youths in *Shadows* and, to a diminishing extent, of their middle-aged successors in *Husbands*, that life's possibilities can still be surprised by lightning raids. When Moskowitz declares: 'All you have to do to have a good time is be yourself,' the optimism is qualified by a later confession: 'I'm having trouble feeling what is right. I just don't feel as much any more.' He is not alone in his dilemma, and the general solution is simply to maintain the verbal pressure until feeling is bulldozed back into being. Emotions have to be made as public as possible, as if they have to be seen to be believed (when Minnie's married lover comes to end their affair, he brings his eldest son as witness, protesting family obligations, his wife's attempted suicide: 'She cut her wrists in front of everyone'). It is left to Minnie to summarise rather bleakly what all the emoting is trying to achieve, the fictions about life and relationships it is trying to fulfil: 'It's some kind of pretend place that people get to and it's just not there.'

Minnie in fact emerges as the credible centre of the film; Gena Rowlands adroitly combining hints of genuine romanticism, the compulsive behaviour which provokes Seymour into complaining about Minnie's lack of timing, and even such dangerously loaded revelatory tics as her constant donning and doffing of

sunglasses. But Moskowitz is continually left out on the limb of the blatant contrivance that underlies such apparently 'improvisatory' scenes as his encounter with a loudly articulate hobo, the predictable bolstering of Jewish humour which is imported from time to time from his family background, and the odd trick of casting which confuses the ageing, fretful hippie of Seymour Cassel's appearance and the youthful vitality of the character he plays. More than any other director, Cassavetes depends on a generous response to the reality of his people; and *Minnie and Moskowitz* is finally a two-figure equation too unbalanced to be easily acceptable.

RICHARD COMBS

Love and Pain and the whole damn thing

Alan Pakula himself has described the couple whose Spanish idyll provides the subject of his latest film as 'the most unlikely pair to reach the screen since Laurel and Hardy.' Yet the improbability of *Love and Pain and the whole damn thing* (Columbia-Warner) lies less in the coupling—of Maggie Smith as Lila Fisher, a prim and repressed English spinster, with Timothy Bottoms as Walter Elbertson, a mumbling young American dropout—than in Pakula's treatment of it, which conjures up curious fantasies of Marguerite Gauthier suffering from hay fever, or of Peter Rogers casting Morecambe and Wise in a remake of *Un Homme et une Femme*. The misfit characters and the heavily signalled theme (the inseparability of love and pain) belong in that territory which Pakula has in the past expertly staked out as his own; but in abandoning irony and ambiguity for alternating layers of slapstick and pathos, he here steadily cuts the ground from under his lovers' credibility, leaving us a party

to their embarrassment but unconvinced of their finer feelings. The exaggerations of farce and those of romantic melodrama prove the most unlikely, and lethal, bedfellows of all.

Hero and heroine emerge into the Mediterranean sunshine from heavily caricatured backgrounds. His is established in the film's pre-credits sequence, with the camera moving down the rows of leather-bound volumes in the family library, while the soundtrack (disjunctive, as in the credits sequence of *Klute*) has Walter replying in asthmatic monosyllables to the relentless academic curiosity of his father's questioning. Hers is established less directly through another of Pakula's favourite expository devices, the telephone call: in this case, to a pair of Bournemouth aunts—Gladys and Vi—whose boarders or inmates lose their false teeth in the parlour piano and turn the simplest formal enquiries into metaphysical Spoonerisms. Though these two scenes, both crammed with information, also have a 'serious' diagnostic function—revealing Walter's cataleptic tendencies, and the first symptoms of the loss of muscular control that is to carry Lila to an early grave—their dominant note is one of social satire. Yet for this to be effective or for the characters to elicit a response as misfits, it is essential that the society from which they deviate should assume some recognisable and coherent form.

Instead, Pakula whisks the clumsy couple from their respective cardboard backgrounds to a sunny Spain peopled with folkloric eccentrics and laden with conflicting mythological references. Lila's first suitor, possibly attracted to the whistling that is one of her less conspicuous nervous tics, woos her with imitation birdcalls before pressing a pet canary to her resisting bosom; later she is rescued from a downhill fall by a lecherous Spanish duke who, appearing *deus ex machina* style in a deserted landscape, carries her off on a white horse to his ancestral

castle (for which her tiny suitcase proves to contain suitable apparel). Even her soft-centred and ultimately passionate relationship with Walter proceeds from one pratfall to the next. Their first encounter (on the back seat of a package tour bus) has Walter bruising her with his knapsack before drenching her crisp linen suit with the contents of his water bottle. And even when, having meanwhile tripped literally over more than one pair of knickers, they bridge the generation gap and abandon the tour for the privacy of a rented trailer, Pakula wastes no opportunity to have doorknobs come away in their hands or his lovers fall on their faces in the mud.

Possibly the romantic decor was intended to highlight the incongruity of their relationship, but it's hard to detect irony in the heart-stirring emphases of Michael Small's obtrusive score, or in the many glossily photographed travel-brochure scenes—the visit to a flamenco club, the hand-in-hand walk to the top of a ruined bell tower—which inspire the couple to overcome their inhibitions and tentatively explore the pleasures of communication. As they sit contentedly round a gipsy bonfire beneath the windmills of La Mancha (which for them has assumed the proverbial significance of Naples), the image freezes while Lila's voice recites her letter of farewell. We next hear Walter, back under parental scrutiny, speaking the text of his reply, arguing that young husbands are as capable as old ones of watching their wives die. The film's final sequence, of the couple back in La Mancha enjoying a nuptial mule-ride, seems hardly more of a fantasy than the bumpy romance which has preceded it, and it is uncertain whether Pakula intended it to be. As a director, he would appear to be more skilful when examining people who (in one of Walter's phrases) 'want to go back to being alone in the dark' than when showing them blossoming out in the sunlight.

JAN DAWSON

BOOK REVIEWS

RUN-THROUGH

By John Houseman

ALLEN LANE, THE PENGUIN PRESS
£5.00

Run-Through ends in 1942, with John Houseman's appointment as chief of American wartime radio propaganda. 'No one, least of all myself, seemed to question the propriety of placing the Voice of America under the direction of an enemy alien of Rumanian birth who, as such, was... expressly forbidden to go near a shortwave radio set.' The irony is of the kind John Houseman evidently enjoys; and these first 500 pages of a glittering autobiography reflect his dispassionate ability to see around himself, to step back from his own distinguished, eclectic, sometimes disorienting career.

The cosmopolitan childhood ('two of my first four birthdays were celebrated on board the

Orient Express'), the English public school education (Clifton), tea with the Woolfs in Bloomsbury, a period in American business which finally saw Jacques Haussmann as head of the Oceanic Grain Corporation, 'navigating a vessel whose decks were already awash' through the Wall Street crash: Houseman's first thirty years were extravagant enough, even as an overture to Orson.

He first saw Welles in 1934, playing Tybalt in Katherine Cornell's *Romeo and Juliet* ('death, in scarlet and black, in the form of a monstrous boy'). Houseman had already made his own original transition from business to the theatre, chiefly as impresario of Virgil Thomson's *Four Saints in Three Acts*. The journey from the Orient Express and the Chicago Wheat Pit to the WPA Federal Theatre and, ultimately, Hollywood would have happened, Welles or no Welles. But the centre of this

memoir, inevitably, is the years with Orson: the voodoo *Macbeth*, *Horse Eats Hat*, the modern dress *Caesar*, *Danton's Death*, the sad saga of *Five Kings* (some of its links to be finally welded together as *Chimes at Midnight*), the *War of the Worlds* broadcast in the year of Munich, *Citizen Kane*.

The record is of talent's generous infatuation with genius. 'My two main functions were first to supply Orson, beyond the limits of prudence and reason, with the human and material elements he required for his creative work; second, to shield him not only from outside interference but, even more, from the intense pressures of his own complicated and destructive nature.' Before *Kane*, Houseman had come to the reluctant conclusion that 'neither creative work nor human values could stand up under the kind of pressure to which Orson and I were subjecting them.' He shepherded Mankiewicz through the *Kane* script (on this contentious and over-discussed subject, he argues firmly that 'Orson... did no more than a creative director is accustomed to do before and during the shooting of a film'); and there, more or less, the unique partnership ended.

Houseman's account of the WPA and Mercury years is finely readable: a grand and precarious theatrical adventure recreated at full stretch. Welles ferociously lashing the Mercury broadcasts



John Houseman at the NFT.
Photograph by Richard Lyon

into last-minute shape; knocking himself out by falling through one of the open traps which littered his *Caesar* stage; sitting in a hotel bedroom, buried under unfurling reels of *Too Much Johnson* film, chortling at his own footage: the portrait is a powerful reinforcement of legend. Houseman's critical summing up comes in connection with the inescapable *Kane* dispute. Welles 'ability to push a dramatic situation far beyond its normal level of tension made him a great director but an inferior dramatist... whenever he strayed outside the solid structure of someone else's work, he ended in formless confusion.' On the other hand, one might say that the attempt to come to terms with

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chaos is itself an essential part of Welles' creative drive.

After *Kane*, and his reunion with Welles for a stage production of *Native Son*, Houseman went to work briefly with David Selznick, helping Hitchcock ('I was unprepared for... a man of exaggeratedly delicate sensibilities') over the script of *Saboteur*. But Hollywood, at that time and after the high-wire balancing act of the Mercury, was only a well-paid, irrelevant interlude; and Houseman's instinct for involvement took him elsewhere. His 'floating, eclectic energy' has wafted him easily, and at key periods, between theatre, radio, films and TV. Now, at seventy, he has turned movie actor, years after his bit in *Seven Days in May*, playing an irascible Harvard law professor in a new picture called *The Paper Chase*. There's a lot left for volume two of this graceful, fine-tempered but far from soft-centred autobiography.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

POUR UNE CONTRE-HISTOIRE DU CINÉMA

By Francis Lacassin

UNION GÉNÉRALE D'ÉDITIONS, PARIS

In this time of monsoon, it may seem ungrateful to complain that whole areas of parched under-soil are being left untouched by the rain of film books. All the same, with information being duplicated, re-duplicated and re-re-duplicated, it is high time someone produced an encyclopaedia which would buy space for itself by simply omitting the Bogarts and Monroes, the Fords and Capras, the Godards and Truffauts. Instead, its *dramatis personae* would begin in areas of neglect like Rowland Brown, Roland West, Helen Chandler, Mal St. Clair, Raymond Griffith, Rowland V. Lee, Boots Mallory, William K. Howard, Evelyn Brent, Joe Roberts, Clarence Badger. . .

Meantime, Francis Lacassin has made a good start, mainly in so far as the early French cinema is concerned. The articles in this volume are mostly reprinted from various magazines, and anyone who has already chanced on 'Louis Feuillade' (S. & S. Winter 1964-65) or 'Out of Oblivion: Alice Guy Blaché' (S. & S. Summer 1971), will instantly rediscover the grave and courtly style which makes Lacassin such a pleasing guide to the obscurer corners of cinema.

Here, for instance, is Gaston Modot tracing a career which stretches from current rebirth as a thriller-writer, back through *L'Age d'Or* to membership in 1910 of Les Pouites, prototype of the Keystone Cops. Or Yvette Andreyor, the long-suffering fiancée of Judex, remembering from the vantage point of a successful career on the stage what it was like to play a whole series of long-suffering heroines for Feuillade nearly fifty years earlier. Or Marcel Allain, surviving co-author of *Fantômas*, recalling the bizarre circumstances

in which he and Pierre Souvestre wrote their monumental (and still delightfully readable) thriller-serial. Or Joe Hamman, star of innumerable French Westerns from 1908 onwards, laconically commenting that the screen cowboy differs from the real thing he knew during his early travels in the Wild West 'par la moustache'.

Serials (including Tarzan) and silent comedies are Lacassin's particular joy, and apart from the interviews with survivors, and a mournful evocation of Pearl White living in exile-retirement in Paris and there vainly attempting come-backs on both stage and screen, this book is particularly valuable for its comparative history (brief but complete with filmography) of the serial, and its attempt to define the innovations as well as the limits of the French slapstick comedies which proliferated during the golden age of 1906-14.

Radiating outwards from Feuillade, the man who gave the serial its *lettres de noblesse* and a tang of poetry, about whom Lacassin has contributed an admirable volume in the Seghers series, and whose films surface *Fantômas*-like in the most unexpected places throughout, the articles in this collection do form a sort of serendipity pattern. Fascinating extracts from letters written by Léon Gaumont from America (1908-1920) warning Feuillade, as his artistic director, that the natives are getting restive, that blood is no longer acceptable across the Atlantic, and that 'poignant dramas' are the order of the day. An essay on Robert Florey, the mysteriously multifarious Frenchman who landed up as a Hollywood director but began by working for Feuillade and appearing in *L'Orpheline*. A filmography of the 'unknown' films of Alain Resnais, acknowledged admirer of Feuillade, whose *Mariénbad* is illuminatingly compared to *Les Vampires*. A reportage on working with Franju, because he remade *Judex* and Lacassin collaborated on the script. An interview with Boileau and Narcejac, because they wrote, for Franju, the script of *Pleins Feux sur l'Assassin*. A brief interview with Maurice Champreux, cameraman and son-in-law to Feuillade, director of the 1933 *Judex*, and—completing the irresistible circle—father of the Jacques Champreux with whom Lacassin co-scripted the 1963 *Judex*.

The only false notes are struck by a rather pointless apologia for Clouzot (who was at one time going to remake *Fantômas*), and some uninspired notes on *Rio Bravo*, Gary Cooper, and the changing face of the Western hero. It is a pity, however, that more care wasn't taken with the physical presentation of the book (in the 10/18 paperback series): apart from being badly printed and atrociously proof-read, it has apparently been left largely unedited, so that articles overlap each other again and again, causing irritating and unnecessary repetitions and recapitulations.

TOM MILNE

LE CINEMA... CETTE INDUSTRIE

By Claude Degand

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By Claude Degand

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HISTOIRE DE LA POLITIQUE DU CINEMA FRANÇAIS: LE CINEMA ET LA IIIe REPUBLIQUE

By Paul Légise

LIBRAIRIE GENERALE DE DROIT ET DE
JURISPRUDENCE (PARIS)

LE REGIME DE L'ORGANISATION PROFESSIONNELLE DE LA CINEMATOGRAFIE: DU CORPORATISME AU REGIME ADMINISTRATIF

By Gérard Valter

LIBRAIRIE GENERALE DE DROIT ET DE
JURISPRUDENCE (PARIS)

The place of film production in the economic life of Western Europe is the subject of continuous change and experiment. Whether production capacity is low, as in Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, the Republic of Ireland, or high, as in France, Britain, Germany, Italy, Spain, administrative schemes vary almost as widely as the number of countries involved. But now there is growing pressure to look at the problems of West European film production as a whole, partly as a defence against the American Challenge, partly (more positively) as an expression of the melding together of industrial effort under the aegis of the European Community. The cry of a Common Film Policy was taken up by the European Parliament in 1972; and it can be expected to grow louder as the months pass, in spite of the stubborn obtrusiveness of the British officials.

There can be little doubt that in the construction of a Community film policy the dominant influence will be a French one, and for two reasons: the French have consciously developed an administrative structure to regulate the film industry and experimented with control and encouragement techniques to a far greater extent than any other non-Communist European country; and the individual who has devoted more personal energy than any other to the promotion of the idea of a common film policy, Claude Degand, is a Frenchman.

It would, therefore, be extremely wise of the political and legal advisers and leaders of the film industries in the other countries of the EEC to learn as much as they can of the way in which the French industry is regulated, the reasons why, and especially the mental processes and assumptions which assuredly will make themselves felt, through the French negotiators, at any discussion on formulation of

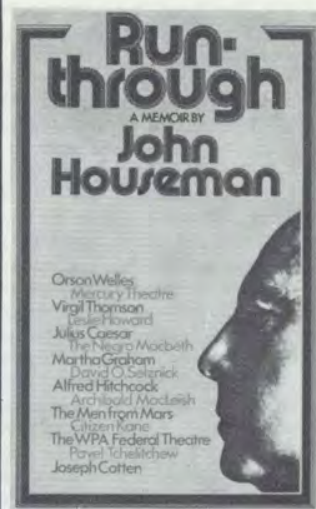
Community policy. It is only if they understand why a particular control technique is being urged—with great plausibility and force of logic—only if they know precisely what function it was originally introduced to remedy, that they can usefully resist its extension. And this is vitally important. For the French film industry is regulated very tightly indeed, to the extent that it is doubtful whether freedom of commerce in that sector exists at all.

Fortunately, we now have a set of books of high quality, all written by senior officials of the Centre National de la Cinématographie, and which approach the French (and European) film industry from different but converging angles. The result is that their reader can now have a very good idea of what makes the French film system tick.

The first two books are by Degand himself, and as it were set the scene in its wider context. *Le Cinéma... cette Industrie* devotes its first half to describing, with abundant tables, the economics of the French film industry up to its climax in 1957, decline, and renewed (and last) climax in 1967. A chapter on "The English Example" consists of a précis of Sproule, and is followed by musings on the changing place of cinema in a television world competing with other leisure activities, thus bringing the author to his final chapter on the cinema in the Common Market and an exposition of his long-held views on the desirability of a common European policy.

One aspect of this is spelt out in unique detail in his privately published book on the role of aids in the financing of films. This is an indispensable analysis of the aid systems operating in Germany, Belgium, France, UK, Italy, Holland, Spain, Sweden, USA, Canada and Japan, kept up to date by periodic (usually every two months) supplements, and containing as exceptionally useful appendices the plans for European harmonisation of aid schemes put forward by C.I.C.E., by Jean-Claude Batz and by the German Government. One can easily imagine that negotiators—whether in industry or in government—who do not have their own comparable sources of international information must be at a considerable disadvantage when discussing questions with the French, who are being serviced by such a dedicated 'chef de documentation' as Claude Degand.

M. Degand's books are descriptive of current or recent situations. Paul Légise has written a work of history. But not only does *Histoire de la Politique du Cinéma Français* cover a period which is very much underemphasised in existing histories, it is also concerned with the events which led up to the present system of regulation. This is the first part of a two volume work, and ends in 1939; for the important developments during the Vichy period and immediately after the liberation we



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"Particularly interesting is the emergence of the young Orson Welles, playing leading roles at 19, and the procedure of production which Mr Houseman outlines and describes without nostalgia and, one suspects, remarkably honestly... One hates to agree with a publisher's blurb but there it is—indeed 'compulsive and compulsory reading for anyone interested in the theatre, cinema and society of that dramatic time'"

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Philip French, The Observer

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The Gold-Tip Pfitzer Irene Handl

A sequel to her bestselling *The Sioux*, Irene Handl's new book *The Gold-Tip Pfitzer*, takes its name from a variety of cypress much favoured in cemeteries, supposed to typify hope amidst the encircling gloom. The death in this case is the death from leukaemia of the child Georges Marie Benoit, the central character of *The Sioux*. All the protagonists of the first novel are here; here too its unique flavour, the freshness, glitter and humour. Few novels of recent years have been so highly praised—and *The Gold-Tip Pfitzer* is in every way its equal.

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shall consequently have to wait. But during the 1930s the seeds were sown, and in part already harvested, for such institutions as centralised box-office control, parafiscal and direct aids, the 'carte professionnelle', 'Dépôt légal', the film register and even the Centre itself.

Indeed it foreshadows more than that; for, among other incidents of the chaotic state of the film industry at that time, the story of Gaumont-Franco-Film-Aubert (GFFA) in 1933-34, which through swift expansion incurred debts which the state took over, uncannily resembles the later saga of British Lion in England. However, of greater significance than this is the strong influence on the thinking of the reform movement in 1936, particularly on the Inspector of Finance, Guy de Carmoy, of the example of Germany, where the industry had been taken in hand with great panache by Goebbels and techniques of assistance and aids (involving, of course, a strong corporatist element and close control) were having very successful effects. It is hardly surprising in the circumstances that French thinking followed the same lines, and after passing through the annealing process of Vichy ultimately produced the Centre National de la Cinématographie. And this is where we come to our fourth book.

Gérard Valter has subtitled his book 'From Corporatism to an

Administrative Regime', and this theme runs like a thread throughout. Its importance will be apparent mainly to lawyers and political scientists, but it does allow the author to clarify the very tight administrative control by which the French film industry is bound. This is primarily the work of the CNC through its power to issue binding regulations, and the extent of this power is shown by a brief list of some areas covered: *production*—conditions for grant of permits to produce a film, norms for the striking of distribution prints; *distribution*—delimitation of distribution regions, maximum and minimum percentage rates for the hire of films; *exhibition*—compulsory filing of box-office returns and ticket records, regulation of the non-commercial sector; *personnel*—regulation of permits to engage in film-making in any capacity and issue of 'professional identity cards'.

Valter's book is an extremely valuable analysis of the working of the most important film industry control organ to exist outside the nationalised industries; indeed it is the only adequate account of the CNC to have appeared. Léglise provides the spiritual background, by showing what the forces were at the formative stage which led to the structure described by Valter. The two books form a single whole, which is emphasised by the similarity in style—the best type of French legal writing, thorough, clear and exhaustive—and the

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Frances Marion (centre) on the set of 'Love from a Stranger' (1936), with Ann Harding and Binnie Hale

richness of experience of both authors. Degand writes from an economic rather than a legal bias, being less concerned with structure and organisation and more with economic viability and social value. He also places the French industry firmly into its European context.

The four books complement each other admirably. For anyone whose work or interest lies in the operation of the film industry (as opposed to the aesthetic quality of its films), particularly in a Franco-European context, all four are vital, none of them really being dispensable. After reading all four the reader will have a thorough grasp of the fundamental principles of the core of the European film industry.

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OFF WITH THEIR HEADS !

By Frances Marion

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY,
NEW YORK, \$8.95

One of the many intriguing and unexplained features of that impossibly remote country of the silent cinema is the pre-eminence, in days long before Women's Liberation, of the lady scenarists. There was Metro's June Mathis, who devised the best Valentino vehicles; De Mille's Jeanie Macpherson; Anita Loos, the child prodigy; Bess Meredyth. And there was Frances Marion, who arrived in Hollywood as an actress in 1914; became a scriptwriter and scenarist of the films that made Mary Pickford the World's Sweetheart, and one of the greatest industrial factors movies ever knew; went on to write some of the most famous films in silent cinema—*Stella Dallas* and *The Winning of Barbara Worth* for Henry King, *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Wind* for Sjöström and Gish, *Son of the Sheik* for Valentino, *Anna Karenina* (as *Love*) for Garbo. When Garbo Talked it was Miss Marion

who provided the words, an adaptation of O'Neill's *Anna Christie*. Later she scripted *Camille*. In the 1930s too were *Min and Bill*, *The Big House*, *The Champ*, *Dinner at Eight*, *Knight Without Armour* (with Herman J. Mankiewicz), for all of which she provided story or screenplay.

Maybe she could have explained the outstanding success of women in this area, but she doesn't (unless it is obliquely, in her own taste in subjects, 'a romantic story, with suspenseful undercurrents and a dramatic climax'). In fact, considering her privileged position as observer of Hollywood's greatest half-century, Miss Marion reveals surprisingly little that is not already known. Her book is a panorama of the passing years and fashions, reflected in the cool and urbane gaze of a not too deeply engaged participant who sometimes gets her chronology a bit confused, and insists on the autobiographer's bad habit of reconstructing, verbatim, forty-year-old conversations.

No one of such memory and literary gift could fail to provide some illuminations. I like the picture of Valentino as (quite literally) the boy next door; of the divine Mabel Normand pointing an accusing finger at Goldwyn and letting fly a torrent of wild Irish curses, pausing only to apologise, 'Excuse me, Frances, for pointing'; of the cowhands and other relics of 19th century California that lingered in Hollywood when Miss Marion arrived there; of the parvenus of the opulent Twenties, wickedly observed; of the bitter fights (particularly with Thalberg) for industrial organisation in the Thirties, when the champions of unionisation included, surprisingly, Ronald Reagan.

And anyone who was at MGM has his own picture of the chameleon L. B. Mayer. Miss Marion observes him pinching bottoms whilst championing the sanctity of womanhood and the American tradition. She was also present when he first made the acquaint-

tance of Mickey Mouse. He had already been affronted by *Flowers and Trees*. ('Women and men dance together. Boys and girls dance together. Maybe in boarding schools girls dance together, but flowers! Bah... I should be interrupted from a conference for such trash.') Mickey sent him into paroxysms. 'All over this country pregnant women go into our theatres to see pictures and rest themselves before their dear little

babies are born, and what do we show them on the screen? Love—and laughter—and happiness... I'm talking about pregnant women and mouses—mice,' he corrected quickly... 'Every woman is scared of a little tiny mouse, admit it. And here you think they're going to laugh at a mouse on the screen that's ten feet high, admit it. And I'm nobody's fool and not taken in by your poor judgment.'

DAVID ROBINSON

Letters

French Connections

SIR,—For anyone who reached the end of Philip French's superficial impressions of America ('French Connections', *SIGHT AND SOUND*, Autumn 1972), I can fill in some salient details which were carefully omitted from his concluding paragraph.

The magazine Mr. French perused on Hollywood Boulevard was *Cinema* (Los Angeles, No. 31). I am the author of 'the offending piece' which drove him to drink. The subject of my article was Raymond Durnat's criticism.

At no point in the piece did I suggest that Mr. Durnat is 'the only significant British critic since the war.' Nor do I denounce Mr. French as 'a paid hatchet man of the British Film Institute.' My article doesn't even mention the British Film Institute. That Mr. French's abysmal review of Mr. Durnat's *Films and Feelings* (*SIGHT AND SOUND*, Autumn 1967) is to him long-forgotten is not much of an excuse. It seems the passage of five years has done nothing to improve the standard of his writing. It's easy to misrepresent if you don't say what it is you're talking about.

Yours faithfully,
ROBERT MUNDY

Beverly Hills, California.

PHILIP FRENCH writes: Mr. Mundy's experience as an 'intern' of the American Film Institute (under whose authoritative letterhead he writes), watching Billy Wilder shoot *Avanti!*, has apparently only been half assimilated—i.e. he is abusive without being witty. I 'carefully omitted' the details to which he draws attention for the simple reason that they were totally irrelevant to my purpose. Which was to give a subjective impression of an experience I had one afternoon on Hollywood Boulevard. It was also intended to be amusing in a bizarre way—the jokes being at my own expense. The description of Mr. Mundy's article may have been coloured by

a certain comic exaggeration, though the tone of his piece was not greatly different from that of his letter. I have often been warned that irony and humour should be eschewed when writing for a serious film magazine, and perhaps I should strive to master that doggedly earnest approach of which Mr. Mundy evidently approves.

As for my 'abysmal review' of Raymond Durnat's *Films and Feelings*, on rereading it for the first time in over five years I find it surprisingly sympathetic and charitable. There is no particular value in reviving that article now just as there was none in identifying it in the 'French Connections' essay. Mr. Durnat took the opportunity to reply to it at length in the following issue of *SIGHT AND SOUND*. The same year he wrote to the *London Magazine* (April 1968) in rather different terms. His letter began: 'I read Philip French's interesting piece on Buñuel with a pleasure excusably, perhaps, enhanced by his kind asides on my *Luis Buñuel*; may I contribute a footnote or two?'

This is the civilised tone in which I like critical debates to be conducted. To the best of my belief there is no continuing animosity between myself and Mr. Durnat, for whose work I have a high regard.

Max Fleischer

SIR,—I see *SIGHT AND SOUND* (Winter 1972/73) makes the same error as so much of the press—*Obituary* (p.26): 'Max Fleischer, cartoonist and creator of Popeye.' He certainly wasn't. He was merely the adaptor of Popeye, and in a degenerate version too, for screen audiences.

Popeye and all the characters were invented by the artist Segar and, drawn by him, they ran all over America in a comic strip entitled 'Thimble Theatre' for years before he became a film cartoon. Segar's original and masterly invention, with all the same characters, was bitter, cynical, astringent—a satire on the heroic epic. Fleischer, and the successor of Segar who carried the strip on in the newspapers for King Features Syndicate after its author was dead, turned it into saccharine, pap for children, U-certificate stuff.

This is not to denigrate Fleischer, whose 'Out of the Inkwell' early blend of drawn and human

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characters combined in a natural setting was, in its day, a cartoon innovation that earns rightful place in every film history. To make the correction is to honour merit, but to direct it where it is properly due.

Yours faithfully,
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Garston, Watford, Herts.

Robert Hughes

SIR,—Because the necrology of 1972 is so particularly and sadly crowded, little reference has been made in Britain to the death from a heart attack on July 24th 1972 of Robert Hughes.

The premature loss at 43 of Bob Hughes ended one of the most distinguished careers in documentary cinema. His *Vladimir Nabokov* is a notably sympathetic portrait, and *Arthur Penn: Themes and Variants* will stand for some years as a yardstick in the depiction of a film-maker on film.

Hughes was a gentle and kind man whose conviction raised his work beyond the level of simple reportage. Those who knew him or heard him speak on his work during his visits to the National Film Theatre will, I am sure, be saddened by his death.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN BAXTER

East Bergholt, Essex.

Film Music

SIR,—I have been entrusted with the task of editing a revised edition of *The Technique of Film Music* by Roger Manvell and John Huntley, to be published by the Focal Press.

Any information from producers, directors, or composers, about films made between 1956 and 1972 which contain a significant musical contribution, would be most helpful. The scope of this definitive reference book is to be international. All types of film music will be included.

Please send information to me at this address.

Yours faithfully,
RICHARD ARNELL

London Film School,
24 Shelton Street,
London, W.C.2.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

JAN AGHED is a Swedish film critic and journalist who writes for the *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*. Contributes to various film periodicals, including the Swedish *Chaplin*, Danish *Kosmorama* and French *Positif*. . . NIGEL ANDREWS has just been appointed film critic of the *Financial Times*. . . JOHN FRANCIS LANE is an English journalist who lives in Rome. Has recently played the part of the Friar in Pasolini's *Canterbury Tales*. . . STEPHEN PEET in 1969 produced and directed the programme on George Pearson in the BBC-TV series *Yesterday's Witness*. . . VICTORIA RADIN is an American journalist living in London. She has worked on a BBC film programme, and has written for the *Sunday Times*, *Nova*, *Time Out*, etc.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

COLUMBIA-WARNER for *O Lucky Man!*, *The Ballad of Cable Hogue*, *On the Waterfront*, *The Ugly American*, *Just Before Nightfall*. UNITED ARTISTS for *Help!*, *A Hard Day's Night*, *The Bed Sitting Room*, *The Knack*, *Last Tango in Paris*, *The Long Goodbye*, *The Mask of Dimitrios*, *The Marat/Sade*.

FOX-RANK for *The French Connection*, *Oliver Twist*, *Minnie and Moskowitz*, *Uzana's Raid*. MGM-EMI for *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, *That'll Be the Day*, photograph of Sam Peckinpah. CINERAMA for *Straw Dogs*, *Junior Bonner*, *The Getaway*.

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PRESIDENT FILM/CINETEL (Paris)/EURO INTERNATIONAL (Rome) for *Une Journée bien Remplie*.

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*ACROSS 110TH STREET

(United Artists)
The hold-up of a Harlem numbers bank starts the blood and adrenalin flowing in this drama of urban ultraviolence. Directed with chilling expertise by Barry Shear, but with a schematic screenplay making heavy weather of the racial tensions which beset both Mafia and police. (Anthony Quinn, Yaphet Koto, Anthony Franciosa.)

**ADVERSARY, THE

(Contemporary)
Satyajit Ray again explores the effect on India's middle classes of the simultaneous spread of poverty and Western technology, this time through the tribulations of a medical student looking for a job. As delicately observed as ever, and here supplemented by fantasy and flashback which underline the hero's retreat from the city's complex corruption. (Dhritiman Chatterjee.) Reviewed.

*BAXTER! (MGM-EMI)

Engaging variation on the well-worn theme of childhood blighted by emotional deprivation. A slightly sticky script, but director Lionel Jeffries has drawn another good performance from a child actor (Scott Jacoby), and there is solid support from Patricia Neal and Jean-Pierre Cassel. (Britt Ekland.)

BLUEBEARD (Cinerama)

The great lover as an impotent Nazi sympathiser is certainly a bizarre concept, but Edward Dmytryk's awkward handling makes it difficult to know when to laugh. Richard Burton looks bored by the whole charade, though the ladies are quite fetching. (Virma Lisi, Nathalie Delon.)

BROTHER SUN, SISTER MOON (CIC)

St. Francis of Assisi as a dropout (complete with hippy girlfriend) fighting the Establishment on behalf of Jesus Christ Superstar, to the accompaniment of saccharine songs by Donovan. Lush to look at but excessively vacuous. (Graham Faulkner, Judi Bowker, Alec Guinness; director, Franco Zeffirelli.)

**CRIES AND WHISPERS

(Gala)
With unprecedented economy of dialogue and movement, Bergman uses the situation of a maid and two sisters gathered round the deathbed of a third to suggest, in a style miraculously balanced between ritual and realism, the agony of solitary suffering and the impossibility of transcending either the solitude or the pain. (Harriet Andersson, Kari Sylwan, Ingrid Thulin, Liv Ullmann.) Reviewed.

**DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE, THE

(Fox-Rank)
Buñuel's savage and blisteringly funny demonstration of the power of appetite to exceed consumption, with six imperturbably elegant bourgeois surviving artistic and physical annihilation in their relentless pursuit of an elusive dinner. (Fernando Rey, Delphine Seyrig, Stéphane Audran.)

*ENGLAND MADE ME

(Hemdale)
Graham Greene's story of Europe crumbling towards war, viewed obliquely through a spider's web

of international fraud which enmeshes a feckless English charmer and his protective sister. Uplifted by Michael Hordern's seedy, ferreting journalist, but the novel's prophetic irony is crushed by the switch to a too specific Nazi Germany. (Michael York, Peter Finch, Hildegard Neil; director, Peter Duffell.)

**EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT SEX... BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK

(United Artists)
Erratic, but on balance brilliantly funny, piece of free-wheeling Woody Allen. At its best when parodying styles and clichés—Antonioni, horror films, Shakespeare, sci-fi, TV panel games—to illuminate, inimitably, the finer points of sexual perversion. (Gene Wilder, Lynn Redgrave; director, Woody Allen.)

*GETAWAY, THE (Cinerama)

Steve McQueen as the Peckinpah hero of closed horizons, exchanging a convict's suit of white for a uniform of black as he batters through South Texas with a woebegone Ali MacGraw in tow. Clocks up a lot of mileage, but with few revelations en route, and Peckinpah only escapes a dead-end through some unconvincing sleight of hand. (Ben Johnson, Al Lettieri.)

**JUST BEFORE NIGHTFALL

(Columbia-Warner)
Another masterly Chabrol study of crime and the middle-classes, superficially a thriller but more profoundly concerned with the confrontation between social norms and 'abnormal' acts. Michel Bouquet at his best as the indulgently guilt-ridden hero. (Stéphane Audran, François Périer.) Reviewed.

*J. W. COOP (Columbia-Warner)

Once more into the rodeo arena, as a one-time circuit star finds that things have changed a bit during his 10-year stretch in jail. Cliff Robertson, directing himself, makes an amiably laconic character out of what is fast becoming a cliché, and the small-town Americana is as convincingly etched in as it was in the later *Junior Bonner*. (Geraldine Page, Christine Ferrare.)

LAST OF THE RED HOT LOVERS (CIC)

Characteristic Neil Simon comedy about a middle-aged restaurateur trying to set up an affair. Overstretched and stagebound, though there's some fun along the way, particularly in Alan Arkin's paragon of urban insecurity. (Paula Prentiss, Sally Kellerman; director, Gene Saks.)

LOVE AND PAIN AND THE WHOLE DAMN THING

(Columbia-Warner)
Alan Pakula's proven talent for making sense of improbable alliances goes farcically astray as Maggie Smith and Timothy Bottoms trail through sunny Spain. Touristy paraphernalia and knockabout script guy both the characters and Pakula's attempts to be funny at their painful expense. Reviewed.

MAN OF LA MANCHA

(United Artists)
Painfully stagebound musical cramped into a series of glumly artificial sets. Apart from one or two pleasant songs, and Peter O'Toole's witty Don Quixote, totally unremarkable. (Sophia Loren, James Coco; director, Arthur Hiller.)

*MINNIE AND MOSKOWITZ

(Fox-Rank)
Ageing hippy Seymour Cassel takes up with lady museum employee Gena Rowlands in a relationship of nervous aggression and confessional monologue. Cassavetes directs as though trying to surprise more out of the characters than he has put in, and the general effect is more

querulous than psychodramatic. (Val Avery.) Reviewed.

**MY CHILDHOOD (Connoisseur)

The life and hard times of a boy in a wartime Scottish mining village. The first chapter in Bill Douglas' autobiographical trilogy, a grainy, hard-edged and wholly original evocation of childhood experience distilled through childhood memory. (Stephen Archibald.) Reviewed.

*PETE 'N' TILLIE (CIC)

The indispensable Walter Matthau paired with Carol Burnett in another sketch for the cinema's gallery of odd couples. A lot of the jokes—by Julius Epstein out of Peter De Vries—are good, but Martin Ritt's monotony of touch renders the comedy more doleful than downbeat. (Geraldine Page, René Auberjonois.)

*PLAY IT AGAIN, SAM (CIC)

Woody Allen as a dithering neurotic, taking tips on how to handle girls from a spectral Bogart and finally achieving his ambition to play the last scene from *Casablanca*. Nervously erratic and unsure of the staying power of its jokes, but amiable and funny in parts. (Diane Keaton, Tony Roberts; director, Herbert Ross.)

PORTNOY'S COMPLAINT

(Columbia-Warner)
Philip Roth's novel stripped of nearly everything but its title in a witless and coyly photographed adaptation which reduces the pressures of orthodox Judaism to conventional ethnic comedy—and despite the dirty words on the soundtrack, keeps most of the sex just outside the frame. (Richard Benjamin, Karen Black; director, Ernest Lehman.)

POSEIDON ADVENTURE, THE

(Fox-Rank)
Plain, old-fashioned entertainment, despite the science-fiction absurdity of its setting (upended ocean liner) and the larger than life Messiah who leads its cross-section to safety. Everyone, including director Ronald Neame, plods through as if it were a ruined Sunday picnic. (Gene Hackman, Ernest Borgnine, Shelley Winters.)

**SALAMANDER, THE

(Connoisseur)
Two Swiss writers try, hopelessly, to discover the 'truth' about the subject of a projected television programme (played, with capricious and malicious charm, by Bulle Ogier). In a style reminiscent of the early New Wave, Alain Tanner wryly demonstrates the power of life to transcend art—and of people to resist society's pigeon-holes. (Jean-Luc Bideau, Jacques Denis.) Reviewed.

**SAVAGES (Hemdale)

James Ivory returns to America for a bizarre, entertaining fantasy, as a wayward croquet ball leads a tribal party from forest games to civilised rituals in a house festooned with Thirties style and bric-à-brac. The rise and fall of civilisation, but to be enjoyed more for its incidental elegance than its central parable. (Louis Staden, Salome Jens, Thayer David.) Reviewed.

**1776 (Columbia-Warner)

Variable but quite appealing film record of Sherman Edwards' witty and historically intriguing musical about the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Excellent lyrics and performances let down by Peter H. Hunt's embarrassing attempts to bring 'cinema' to his own stage production. (William Daniels, Howard Da Silva, Ken Howard.)

SKINFlicker (Connoisseur)

Produced by the BFI Production Board, Tony Bicat's controversial film invites its audience as voyeurs to an act of terrorism. The pornography of violence is conveyed with an effectively raw immediacy, but the film-within-a-film structure is less than

convincing, and the political message confused. (Will Knightley, Henry Woolf.) Reviewed.

**SUMMER SOLDIERS

(Amanda)
Unromanticised and thoroughly documented dramatisation of the problems of—and created by—American deserters living in Japan. A convincing portrayal, by Keith Sykes, of a lonely outsider who finds it hard to understand his desertion in political rather than personal terms, and vents his pent-up frustrations on the families who shelter him. (Director, Hiroshi Teshigahara.)

SUPERFLY (Columbia-Warner)

Fashionably downbeat and thoroughly slick piece of packaged fun and games about a big-time New York drug-pusher. He's black, the white cops are crooked, and just about everything else is predictable, right down to the slow motion violence. (Ron O'Neal, Carl Lee, Sheila Frazier; director, Gordon Parks, Jr.)

TCHAIKOVSKY (MGM-EMI)

After Russell, the authorised version—and a generally dull biography which steers resolutely clear of the composer's sexual problems. Marginally redeemed by some eye-catching photography, but fatally marred by Dmitri Tiomkin's lush arrangements. (Innokenti Smoktunovsky, Antonina Shuranova; director, Igor Talankin.)

**TRASH (Vaughan Films)

The Warhol Factory's warning on drugs, with a bleary-eyed Joe Dallesandro discovering that the needle turns him off sex, and a gallery of Factory freaks trying hard to turn him on. Amusing, innocuously outrageous, and under Paul Morrissey's guiding hand slicker—some would say regrettably—than anything from the same stable. (Holly Woodlawn, Jane Forch.)

*TRAVELS WITH MY AUNT

(MGM-EMI)
Graham Greene's novel emerges much reduced, and it's disappointing that Cukor's style, though sometimes fetching in itself, should seem so over-florid for Greeneland. A tiringly metallic performance by Maggie Smith as tireless Aunt Augusta; and a well-paced one by Alec McCowen as the staid bank manager nephew wrestled from his dahlia. (Robert Stephens.) Reviewed.

**TWO LANE BLACKTOP

(Fox-Rank)
Monte Hellman's transAmerican odyssey covers a lot of unattractive smalltown territory as it chronicles the finally purposeless race between a beat-up Chevrolet and a sparkling G.T.O., a pair of drop-outs and a middle-class psychopath. *Duel* may have stolen some of its thunder, but the traffic interest is here subordinate to some finely judged characterisations. (James Taylor, Dennis Wilson, Warren Oates.)

*ULZANA'S RAID (Fox-Rank)

An Aldrich Western, plotted rather like one of his World War II missions. Shorn of any heroics, the action this time has several edges, cutting a fine swathe through many a portentous latter-day Western and saying more about Indians and Indian-fighters than all the specious pleading of the *Soldier Blues*. (Burt Lancaster, Bruce Davison, Jorge Luke.) Reviewed.

VALACHI PAPERS, THE

(CIC)
The confessions of a Mafia veteran, following hard on the footsteps of *The Godfather*, but a long, long way behind in style, pace and performance. A weary Franco-Italian plod through three decades of intrigue and violence, indifferently marshalled by Terence Young. (Charles Bronson, Mario Pilar.)

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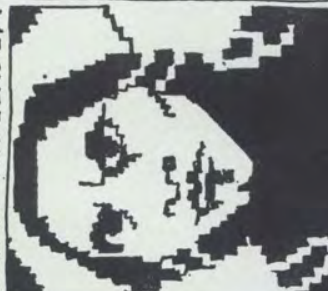
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